

Thank you Mr. President.

This statement is delivered on behalf of Plan International and other child rights NGOs.

We welcome today's debate and the space provided to discuss the pressing matter of ICTs and child sexual exploitation.

As highlighted by today's panelists, internet and communications technologies represent undeniable challenges to child protection. All relevant actors, including governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, and law enforcement agencies, must take immediate action to ensure that children can take full advantage of these technologies in a safe and protected manner.

We must not forget, however, that ICTs are an important tool to empower children and young people. The advantages of these technologies are evident:

1. ICTs can transform the learning experience, and allow children to acquire new skills.
2. They enable children to be champions for their rights and denounce human rights abuses and violence. Additionally, in cases where girls are excluded from community life and decision-making processes, ICTs can provide an important opportunity for them to take an active part in their communities.
3. ICTs provide information that adolescent boys and girls may otherwise have difficulty accessing, such as on their sexual and reproductive health and rights.
4. Studies have shown that mastering technologies helps provide girls with a sense of self-esteem and independence.

Although the factors putting children at risk of experiencing violence are multiple and complex, ensuring that children are empowered is critical. This will not only allow them to contribute to their own protection, but also help us move towards more equitable and safer societies for all children.

In addition to the overall benefits of ICTs for the empowerment of girls and boys, these technologies can contribute directly to the reduction of violence against children and the strengthening of child protection systems. To this end, we would like to share some good practices:

1. Plan International is using dedicated mobile phone applications and SMS services in Kenya and Benin, *inter alia*, through which children, youth and other witnesses are able to send information about violent incidents using a text message.
2. Birth certificates are often crucial to increase children's access to their rights to health, education and protection from violence. Since 2005, Plan International has helped register 40 million children, and is using digital birth registration across Africa and Asia.

We therefore call on States to:

1. Ensure that all children, without discrimination of any kind, have equal access to information, including ICTs, as is their obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This must include removing barriers to access by addressing social norms that place less value on girls' education and in usage of technology.
2. Take immediate steps to provide birth certificates to every child, and explore avenues to make civil registration systems more effective and accessible through digitization.

3. Partner with civil society organizations to identify innovative ways to combat violence and exploitation, including by facilitating means for children to report cases of violence.

Providing equal access to information and media is necessary to ensure that the promise of the Sustainable Development goals - that no one is left behind – is fulfilled.

Thank you.