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the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable
development: the role of digital technologies on social
development and well-being of all**

Statement submitted by Concepts of Truth, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Digital Technology's Effects on Maternal Health and Well-Being

For those who have access to a computer or smartphone, the amount of information available with just a click seems limitless. While the benefits of digital technology seem just as limitless, the reality is that digital technology is a powerful, double edged sword. On the one hand, digital communication provides speedy access to information, medical care and communities that enhance our health and well-being, but on the other hand, the rise of digital technology has brought an explosion of sexual vulnerability for women and children, politicized medical care, and dehumanized relationships in ways that threaten the mental, physical and emotional well-being of millions of people.

Access to Information

According to UNESCO, education is a basic human right on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. Education lifts women out of poverty, decreases their vulnerability to sexual exploitation and gives them an opportunity to enter the labor force in places where that has been socially less acceptable. *How are Poverty and Sexual Violence Related?* Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. 2015. Despite ambitious efforts, however, 750 million adults – two-thirds of whom are women, still lack the basic reading and writing skills necessary for instruction. UNESCO Institute of Statistics. 2017, *E-9 Forum Meeting*.

Digital technology has contributed significantly to literacy goals by providing the possibility of learning anywhere, anytime. Thus, for example, UNESCO, in collaboration with the Microsoft Corporation, has offered educational programs on mobile devices to women in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Central America to boost literacy, improve health, and develop skills to broaden their participation in society. *Reaching Vulnerable Populations*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Feb. 5, 2019.

Around 4.8 million people worldwide have been sexually exploited as part of the \$99 billion commercial sex trafficking industry with 63% of underage victims claiming they had been sold online and 55 percent of trafficked women reporting they had had at least one abortion, often coerced. Plaster, G. *Shock Study: 55% of Sex-Trafficking Victims Become Pregnant, Forced Into Abortion*. LifeNews. Sep. 24, 2014.

Access to Maternal Healthcare

Every day, about 830 women die from complications resulting from pregnancy and childbirth, and the vast majority of these deaths are preventable. Ninety-nine percent of all maternal deaths and high rates of infant mortality that take place in developing countries in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and parts of Latin America because they lack access to basic medical resources. World Health Organization, *Maternal Mortality*. May 2014. Notwithstanding, UNESCO reports that maternal health education accounts for half of all lives saved through lower child mortality rates, and the dramatic decline in preventable child deaths is “one of the most significant achievements in human history.” *Reduce Child Mortality*. MDG Monitor. 2016.

Technological innovations are broadening access for life-saving healthcare. Mobile devices extend critically needed maternal health data for diagnosis and treatment to medical workers on the frontlines in developing countries. For example, it is now possible to quickly obtain high-quality ultrasound images on devices the

size of a laptop computer. As ultrasounds become accessible to remote and underfunded clinics, women will have access not only to better pregnancy care, but also to preventative treatment, timely diagnosis, and improved emergency care. Powell, C. *New Affordable Technology is Improving Women's Health Access*. Council on Foreign Relations. 2018.

Concepts of Truth, Inc., NGO applauds the technological advances in maternal and infant healthcare and stands unequivocally for the protection of human life at all stages. Much progress remains. Between 2015 and 2019, approximately 61% of unintended pregnancies ended in abortion, for an average of 73.3 million abortions per year worldwide. Bearak, J. *Unintended Pregnancy and Abortion*, *The Lancet*. Sep. 1, 2020. In the U.S., over 7.2% of those abortions occurred between 14 and 20 weeks gestation. Barry, M. *Abortion At or Over 20 Weeks Gestation*, Congressional Research Service. April 30, 2018. For many of the women who have had abortions, they would claim that they never received information about the physical and mental consequences of abortion, nor were they informed that at 16 weeks, an unborn baby is able to move about, suck its thumb, blink its eyes and kick its legs, and that its heart and circulatory system are fully functioning. *Pro-life Across America Statistics* (2020).

The importance of informed decision-making in the area of reproductive health cannot be underestimated, especially during lockdowns where gender based violence and abortions have increased dramatically as access to medical facilities and professionals has decreased. While for some women, abortion may provide short term relief from the physical and emotional stress of carrying an unexpected or unwanted child to term, numerous global studies have confirmed the negative short and long-term health impact of abortion, including the prevalence of immediate post-abortion hemorrhage, infertility, uterine/cervical lacerations, retained fetal body parts, breast cancer, autoimmune disease and numerous psychiatric complications, including severe depression and suicide. Langranchi, A. *Complications: Abortion's Impact on Women*, DeVeber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research, Toronto, Canada, 2015.

Concepts of Truth, Inc. seeks to educate girls and women with necessary information to make informed choices. For women who have chosen to abort their babies, the NGO provides compassionate counseling to help them and their loved ones find closure through the grieving process. For those considering abortion, Concepts of Truth, Inc.'s international 24/7 helpline provides crucial life-affirming information.

Access to Wider Communities

Technology has enhanced communication at many levels and afforded women with access to a mobile device the chance to digitally have a voice in communities around the globe. For many women in remote areas, this means that their influence is no longer limited by their geography. Such easy access to social groups has spawned a proliferation of apps for people to “meet” each other online and then perhaps continue the conversation in person. Sadly, however, it appears that for many, dating apps have supplanted romance, and have dehumanized relationships, lowered self-image, and encouraged promiscuity in an expanding and increasingly impersonal and self-serving hookup culture. Whitley, W., *Are Dating Apps Damaging Our Mental Health?* *Psychology Today*. Oct. 8, 2018.

Concepts of Truth, Inc. NGO's sexual health curriculum, *Concepts of Sexual Health Sex & You* teaches teens about the emotional damage caused by the “hook-up” culture, encourages saving sex for one monogamous partner, inhibits the spread of sexually transmitted disease, curbs unwanted pregnancies, promotes families and transmits truth about the dignity of life and the value of the whole person. In keeping

with the goals of the Geneva Consensus Declaration, we must ensure that the benefits of digital technology promote the four pillars supported by at least 32 member states: (1) better health for women, (2) the preservation of human life, (3) the strengthening of family as the foundational unit of society, and (4) protecting every nation's national sovereignty in global politics. Concepts of Truth, Inc., an ECOSOC accredited NGO, recommends that member states join in keeping with the Declaration's goals to ensure that digital technology promotes social development and the well-being of all.
