



## **National Statement, delivered during Panel Discussion on the Gender Digital Divide in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**27 September 2021**

**Madam President,**

We thank all the panelists for their contributions.

Promoting women empowerment and ending discrimination and violence against women remain our core obligations not only as individuals but as societies, communities, and countries.

In this spirit, today's discussion is timely and relevant as the world is grappling with contemporary challenges related to gender digital divide and threats faced by women and girls, both online and offline in exercising their fundamental rights. Critically, progress in the field of science & technology in many societies is hampered due to insufficient women participation owing to limited access to ICTs.

Women empowerment is a national priority for Pakistan. Our Constitution guarantees that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex. Pakistani women have shown their strength and professionalism in multiple fields ranging from politics to diplomacy, literature to medicine, engineering to law enforcement and software professionals to household. Pakistan is taking concrete steps to bridge the digital divide and enhance women access to ICTs. Pakistan's Flagship Ehsaas initiative provides a template to harness data-based evidence to empower women through financial and digital inclusion.

Eliminating disparities in ensuring women and girls' access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is not a matter of choice. It is essential – as most of these technologies shape our lives in several ways, providing opportunities and creating conditions in which women and girls benefit from digital technologies, skills and resources will be key to our collective endeavor to achieve gender equality in digital age.

For Pakistan and other developing countries, countering the digital gender divide is a question of financial constraints and not social stereotyping.

Gender digital divide also underpins the existing structural inequalities within and between societies and countries. In addition, socio-economic constraints impede capacities of developing countries to promote enjoyment of human rights, invest in human development and importantly promote women empowerment through access to ICTs. Developing countries also face the challenge of overcoming barriers of unequal access to ICT training and education for women. These developments notwithstanding, we are witnessing gender digital divide globally as a result of social stereotypes and taboos, hindering women participation on equal footing in digitized societies.

COVID pandemic has exacerbated the preexisting inequalities thus further deepening the gender digital divide. COVID related socio-economic impacts have drastically reduced fiscal space of developing countries to make enough financial resources available not only in promoting gender parity but in general promoting access to ICTs and to achieve SDGs especially SDG 5. Such



challenges call for greater international collaboration aimed at addressing socio-economic inequalities, bridging resource gap, transfer of technology and sharing of knowledge, good practices and experiences.

I thank you