

United Nations in Palestine marks International Women's Day

Today, the United Nations in Palestine marks International Women's Day under the theme "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality".

Innovation and technology can greatly improve the well-being, education, health and livelihoods of girls and women. It allows them to find previously unavailable information and support groups or to develop their own online businesses. Technology also allows women to access loans online, in turn preventing other household members from controlling the funds. And it has increased the ability of governments to issue identification allowing women to access health and other services.

Despite the great potential, we also need to be aware of the risks and challenges linked to the digital divide which deepens gender inequalities; very evident in Palestine where neither 4 or 5G is available and restrictions in Area C limit digital infrastructure, connectivity, and high-speed broadband access.

Women and girls in Palestine are also increasingly subject to digital gender-based violence including through family and partners controlling their access to ICT. Sexual harassment including, in some cases, blackmail is prevalent. In recent years, women's human rights defenders are increasingly subjected to online misogynistic attacks and threats by those hoping to silence women's human rights defenders. Governments are obliged to prevent and hold to account any act of discrimination or violence against women; these obligations extend to online space and the use of ICT.

The United Nations' first-ever report on technology, innovation, education and gender equality provides many recommendations. They must be followed.

It calls for gender-responsive education and skills training; algorithms that align with human rights and gender equality; and investment in bridging the digital gender divide.

More than ever, we need collective action by governments, civil society, the private sector, and the technology community.

Third, we must create a safe digital environment for women and girls.

Globally, the United Nations is working with other stakeholders to advance a Code of Conduct for information integrity on digital platforms to reduce harm and increase accountability while defending the right to freedom of expression. In Palestine, the United Nations continues to advocate for the active and equal participation of women and girls and to support the development of new and innovative tools and platforms.

More measures need to be put in place to reduce the digital gender divide, mainstream digital solutions into women's businesses, facilitate their inclusion in digital and ICT-based incubators and businesses, including research and development. We need to keep enhancing women and girls' access to digital spaces to enable them to unlock their full potential through technology; they cannot be left behind.