



## Women's Rights and the Internet

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS  
A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION IN GENERAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS

APC brings attention to emerging threats to women's freedom of expression and emerging forms of violence on the internet that impact on women's rights.

These two trends relate to the reports of the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression and on Violence Against Women during this 17<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council.

The first report points out that *"the Internet has become a key means by which individuals can exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression"*. Access to the internet is enabling women to exercise their right to expression and access to information and in the process, it also enables their participation in the economy, to exercise citizenship rights, access services, engage in formal and informal processes to determine their social, cultural and political life.

However, growing incidence of censorship measures such as blocking and filtering internet content have the effect of disproportionately restricting women's right to freedom of expression. In particular, content related to women's sexuality have been targets of censorship. For example, images of breastfeeding were removed on Facebook, advertisements on abortion services were restricted in some countries by Google and in Indonesia, national internet service providers were ordered to block access to a webpage that published a comic form that talks about human rights of lesbian, queer, gay, bisexual and transsexual groups, for being pornographic. These restrictions run counter to the fulfilment of bodily integrity rights and individual self-determination.

As early as 2006, the UN Secretary General's report on Violence Against Women called for more inquiry about the use of the internet and mobile phones in developing forms of violence.

In this regard, APC welcomes the proposals of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women to utilise a holistic approach to the issue of violence against women. APC also brings attention to emerging forms of technology mediated violence such as cyberstalking, digital surveillance, manipulation of personal information and images and sexual harassment that compromise women's security and safety.

APC calls on States to acknowledge that restrictions (whether due to state, family or cultural reasons) to women's use of the internet adversely affect women and girls rights to participate in cultural life and the full exercise of their citizenship within the evolving information society.

We encourage strategies that empower women to use technology, including the internet, to realise the full range of their human rights, combat discrimination and protect themselves from violence.

*For more information please contact:*

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