



**Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate and VIVAT International**

**Oral Statement to the 59th Session of the Commission for Social Development**

**Title: Digital Technology and its Impact on the Education of Children and Youth**

Madam/Mr. Chair, Good Morning/Afternoon!

Thank you for the opportunity to address you. I am the Youth Representative speaking on behalf of our organisation, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate and VIVAT International serving in more than 120 countries.

Digital technology has achieved much in connecting global communities and during the pandemic, allowed some economies to continue functioning. But lack of access excludes those from vulnerable communities, especially children and young people, from a quality education. As our organisations work among the most vulnerable and neglected around the world, we see the negative impacts first hand.

During the initial Covid-19 lockdown students at our schools in Mauritius, Kenya, India and other countries were not prepared for online classes. Many did not have internet access or the necessary equipment, such as smartphones or tablets, to access their lessons. While some students were able to participate through innovative means such as WhatsApp groups, Microsoft Teams gatherings, or Google classrooms, other students, through the support of relevant government agencies, were only able to access their lessons through broadcast television and radio.

The greatest impact, however, is on the emotional health of students. Many of them struggle with situations in which parents lost jobs and are facing financial trouble. Our local networks were able to provide material and emotional support, including supplying much-needed food and necessities.

We appreciate the efforts taken by the United Nations and its member States to address the digital divide. However, we know that at the peak of the pandemic, UNESCO reported that at least 1.6 billion students in 194 countries were impacted by school closures. Millions of students continue to be without access to adequate internet services and devices required for learning. These students are significantly disadvantaged and bear the brunt of the educational fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**We therefore, call on the United Nations and its Member States to work together to end the digital divide by committing to three key actions:**

1. Recognise that access to digital technology is a fundamental human right, and included in a child's right to education.
2. Provide digital technology in a manner that is readily available, accessible and affordable to all sections of society, particularly those most vulnerable such as women and children.
3. Provide social protection services for all individuals and families so that food, water, housing, energy, healthcare, and transportation are available to all, enabling children and youth to receive a safe, quality education which can flexibly respond to the challenges of this global pandemic.