



## Using Technology to Promote Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Myanmar

Side-event at the 67th Session of Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67)

**Organisers:** Gender Equality Network (GEN) Myanmar, Women Advocacy Coalition-Myanmar (WAC-M), Norway, Spain and UN Women.

**Co-sponsors:** Sweden

**Date:** Monday 6 March, 2023, 1:15-2:30PM

**Location:** Conference Room 1, UN, New York

### Concept Note

#### **Background**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 military coup the hard-won gains achieved for women and girls in Myanmar have been lost and they now face a compounded crisis. Women human rights defenders have become political targets resulting in their harassment, forcible detention, displacement and death, with many having to flee the country for safety. Escalated fighting has increased the vulnerability of already marginalised women and girls to conflict-related sexual violence, early and forced marriages, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, irregular labour migration and engagement in the drug trade.

Women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) used the opening of civic space during Myanmar's democratic transition to grow and establish strong networks at Union and State levels, becoming key actors in policy and programming for women and girls. Despite the significant challenges they face, these networks and individual women human rights defenders continue to play a critical leadership role in promoting human rights and highlighting the gendered impacts of the crisis.

One positive outcome of Myanmar's compounded crisis has been the accelerated use of online technologies by women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and women-civil society organisations (WCSOs) to promote and protect human rights. Travel restrictions and lockdowns implemented in response to COVID-19 meant WHRDs and WCSOs had to quickly adapt and use online platforms to continue their activities and communicate within and across their networks. Following the military coup on 1 February 2021, the de facto authorities attempted to suppress pro-democracy forces and human rights activists by imposing restrictions on internet access, making it very difficult for people to access information, upload and share pro-democracy content and organise pro-democracy protests. Despite this, many WHRDs and WCSOs were able to quickly transition their activities and communications to online platforms that have allowed them to continue to organise, provide life-saving humanitarian assistance, monitor and report human rights violations and stay connected to the world outside of Myanmar, including the diaspora. However, doing this work places WHRDs and WCSOs at high risk of arrest, detention and even death, which makes the use of secure, encrypted platforms all the more important.



In addition to the considerable political risks WHRDs and WCSOs face when using online platforms to support their work in Myanmar, they also face a number of other challenges including online violence and gender disparities in access to these technologies. WHRDs and other activists in Myanmar have been subjected to doxing, 'the act of publishing private or identifying information about an individual online' without their consent. This has, in some instances, resulted in WHRDs limiting the content they produce and refraining from sharing their opinions online; made more challenging by the near absence of any formal legal process through which to report these incidents. In addition, women and girls often have fewer opportunities to develop digital skills as a result of their greater care responsibilities and limited mobility.

In line with the priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 67 theme of ***Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls***, the Gender Equality Network (GEN) Myanmar, Norway, Spain and Sweden, with support from UN WOMEN would like invite you to a CSW side-event on the challenges and opportunities technology brings for women and girls in Myanmar. In light of the many and recent crises, global attention towards Myanmar has been slowly diminishing. As such, this will be an important opportunity to raise the profile of the issues facing women and girls in Myanmar, as heard through the WHRDs and WCSOs themselves, by engaging Member States and policy-makers in the discussions on the way forward.

#### **Objectives:**

1. To showcase innovative uses of technology by women human rights defenders and women-led civil society organizations in Myanmar, and how these have contributed to women's participation in the advancement of peace and security in the country.
2. To discuss the challenges faced by women human rights defenders and women-led civil society organizations in using technology to track human rights violations and advocate for the protection of civilians, particularly women and girls, and to explore ways in which Member States and policymakers can support these efforts and promote the women, peace and security agenda in Myanmar.

#### **Format**

Following the opening remarks, the event will showcase a poignant video presentation capturing the voices of women and girls from Myanmar. This will be followed by a thought-provoking panel discussion. The panel will feature women human rights defenders and women-civil society organizations hailing from Myanmar, and will be moderated by UN Women. The discussion will delve into the challenges and opportunities that women and girls face in the region, and will draw on the findings and recommendations gleaned from the **"Assessment on technological challenges and opportunities for women and girls in Myanmar,"** conducted jointly by GEN Myanmar and the Myanmar Internet Project (MIP).



### Programme Format

#	Action	Time (EST)	Contribution by
1.	Welcome remarks	1:15-1:20	Björg Sandkjær, State Secretary for International Development, Norway
2.	Co-Sponsor remarks	1:20-1:25	Ana Jiménez, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Spain to the United Nations
3.	Presentation: Short video featuring WHRDs and WCSOs using online technologies in Myanmar to promote GEWE	1:25-1:30	Gender Equality Network (GEN) Myanmar
4.	Panel Discussion (4 panelists) including Q+A	1:30-2:20	Moderator: Sarah Taylor, Peace, Security and Resilience Team, UN Women  Wai Wai Nu, Women's Peace Network Myanmar  Yatanar, Consultant, Myanmar Internet Project  May Sabe Phyu, Director, Gender Equality Network (GEN) Myanmar  Khin Lay, Coordinator, Women Advocacy Coalition - Myanmar (WAC-M)
5.	Co-sponsor remarks	2:20-2:25	Åsa Regnér, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women
6.	Closing remarks	2:25-2:30	Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Myanmar Permanent Representative to the United Nations