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Good morning! I am honored and delighted to be here with you today to discuss how, together, we may make meaningful progress in an area that is of critical importance to the future of innovation, and, therefore, to us all.

I remember the excitement in my post-college days more than 35 years ago, when we were discovering the power of technology. A social platform developed by a twenty-something in a garage was allowing millions of people around the world to not just chat but to share experiences online. And just like that [maybe snap fingers], I found friends online from my childhood in Calcutta, who I had lost touch with as I began my new life in New York. I saw photos of their families and posts about their careers and felt connected again. As search functions developed, I could type in a few words and have vast amounts of information at my fingertips without having to walk to a library or crack open a single page of Encyclopedia Britannica. (If you're not old enough to remember those, Google it!) Who here remembers those? Clearly my technology timing as a student left a bit to be desired. Today, ChatGPT can write your entire term paper or government policy to end gender violence through AI analysis that synthesizes "intelligence" that is out there in the world.

The transformative technological evolution that has followed reflects the ability of human beings to find new spaces to flourish and connect. Not just to enjoy learning and being in new communities but using the tools to demand change. Think about what technology can do:

- Technology allowed for the elimination of the middleman in many economies, enabling the expansion of markets to directly reach farmers and corners of villages.
- The explosive growth of social media has allowed movements such as the #MeToo movement and Arab Spring to snowball and push back against autocrats who stymied democracy.
- Millions of women-led movements have helped suppress some of the world's most repressive dictatorships from tea sellers in the Sudan and grandmothers in Algeria to sisters and wives in Chile.
- Rapid innovation can help us not only imagine a stronger future in which we ALL are inextricably linked and can thrive, but actually create it!

The digital economy accounts for 16% of global growth, growing at 2.5x faster than the rest of the world economy. Everything we do today, from education to entertainment and from career development to healthcare is inextricably linked to AI as technology continues its march to the core of every industry and human endeavor from how we brush our teeth to how we meet potential partners, in business and in life. The COVID pandemic only deepened this reality. We are emerging from it ever more fluent in technology, and dependent upon it.

The digital world is powerful and largely unregulated. We know that combination can be dangerous. The empirical question is who controls the power?

The fundamental issue with the rapid development of technology is that not enough women had a voice in designing the frameworks under which early digital platforms were developed. In the 1970's only 8% of women were data scientists and experts in computer engineering and as a result, the rules were established by and credited to men. Most of us don't remember or never heard of Ada Lovelace, Grace Hopper or Dorothy Vaughn who were computing pioneers but Mark Zuckerberg is a household name. As untold wealth was accumulated in this arena, that space became even more exclusive. Today we see that same pattern repeat itself in the development of Web3 where only 13% of Web3 founding teams include a woman and only 7% of founders are women+.

Like in real life, the gender divide is played out digitally. Around the world, access to digital platforms is not unilateral. Women and marginal groups are underrepresented in the frameworks and governance of the digital world and rarely participate in designing innovative systems or the leadership that is regulating tech. Furthermore, approximately one billion women do not have access to digital financial services for example, denying them the power to fully participate in their own economic security. We have heard countless stories of women not having access to computers and cell phones and therefore being unable to protect their families during the pandemic.

As we well know, women face myriad forms of discrimination online, from privacy concerns, harassment, sexual exploitation and horrific violence such as trafficking and image-based sexual abuse particularly on social media. The global prevalence of online violence against women is 85%* with 45% of Millennials and 31% of Baby Boomers women experiencing sexual harassment. In the Middle East, 98% of women have been targeted. Prominent political figures such as Jacinda Arden and Nicola Sturgeon were relentlessly attacked online and ultimately they opted out of their leadership. As women opt out, gender equality suffers disproportionately as women lose economic agency, safety, mental health security and political power.

And given the speed with which tech is developing and Governments being able to get ahead of it before it runs out of control, something has to change now. The UN backed Global Digital Compact set to be adopted by 2024, offers us all the chance to make that change happen, starting right now. Multi-stakeholder coordinated action is urgent and critical for systemic change.

Equality Now has a long history of using legal reform to deliver systemic change for women and girls. As with so many things, we can't do this on our own and this challenge is one of the biggest we have taken on. Which is why it is so heartening to be invited by the Finnish government, who we regard as key allies in the road to gender equality, to talk with you about this urgent imperative of securing a just digital future.

Last year, Equality Now together with Women in AI, developed an Alliance for Universal Digital Rights which include nine principles. AUDRi believes these principles will inform global efforts towards a future where all citizens of the global digital ecosystem, no matter where they are or where they live, can enjoy equal rights to safety, freedom and dignity. This framework rooted in human rights law is underpinned by an intersectional feminist, anti-discrimination analysis. Let me share what this looks like:

Equal protection from persecution, oppression and abuse
Equal access to information, opportunity and community
Equal respect for privacy, identity and self-expression.

As we know, the digital environment transcends borders. This future can only become reality if governments and leaders put in place mutual and binding agreements to uphold these rights, minimize infringements and develop mechanisms to hold violators to account. And just as the efforts of individual nations alone cannot solve a global climate crisis, we cannot depend on separate national laws and policies to guide, regulate and care for our global digital ecosystem. To achieve universal equality of safety, freedom and dignity, we must institute a universal approach to defining, upholding and advancing global digital rights for everyone. This framework rooted in human rights law is underpinned by an intersectional feminist, anti-discrimination analysis.

The Gender Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality, organized under the auspices of U.N. Women in partnership with the Mexican and French governments, are making progress toward this end. This coalition includes the governments of Finland, Chile, Tunisia, Armenia and Rwanda; major tech platforms such as Microsoft and Salesforce; multinational institutions, including UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union; and civil society organizations and foundations, including the Global Fund for Women, Digital Grassroots, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Their agreed-upon goals include making digital space

safer for women, fast-tracking women's tech leadership and supporting the entry of women and girls into the tech industry.

AUDRi demonstrates Equality Now and our partners' Generation Equality commitment to mobilizing international action towards a global, intersectional feminist framework that would level the digital playing field for women worldwide.

Women need to own and redesign this future.

Creating a more equal and represented digital future will enable us to build an inclusive ecosystem that can unlock the true potential of a gender equal world. Funding innovation, upping women's participation and taking back our power as creators and solutionists is my call to action to you all today. It is essential that women's voices be brought to the center of the discussions and decision-making to ensure that the Global Digital Compact intended to inform and guide the digital future, reflect women's diverse needs and ideas.

So what can YOU do?

- Each and every one of you in this room can take action to move this work forward. Certainly follow the work of AUDRi online and on LinkedIn and share it widely on media channels and in your conversations.
- Help us spread the word and resource the work – connect the dots around governments, institutions, corporates and individuals to have all of us in this together – we need resources and champions. UN Member States, please support this work and bring these digital principles to life.
- After this session, build your to-do list of how you can more deeply engage in this work and if you need ideas, please reach out to us – we are happy to be partners and co-creators.

I invite you all to join us in this journey to seize the opportunity to transform the digital world as a centerpiece in the movement for advancing gender rights. To those of you who might say, there is so much else to be done; perhaps now is not the time, I offer the words of Susan Wojcicki, one of the founders of Google who is now the CEO of YouTube: "Life doesn't always present you with the perfect opportunity at the perfect time.... Opportunities, the good ones, they're messy and confusing and hard to recognize. They're risky. They challenge you." What better challenge to tackle together than this one, at this time? Not only does the future for gender equality stand to benefit, the future of global innovation will as well.

I thank the National Council of Finnish Women, for hosting me today, and all of you for joining us in this important work.

I'm S. Mona Sinha, Global Executive Director of Equality Now, the international human rights organization advocating legal equality around the world and co-founder of the Alliance of Universal Digital Rights. Through this piece I will talk readers through the urgent need to include women as part of the conversation on digital rights, and to ensure proper protection mechanisms are put in place so that everyone, regardless of their geographic position, background, or ethnicity can access the internet freely without fear of harassment or discrimination, and for children to enjoy the same rights and protections online as they do offline.

+ source: BCG Report

*source: The Economist Intelligence Unit, March 2021