**MY CONTRIBUTION ON THE THEME “DIGITAL EDUCATION FOR YOUTH AND YOUTH PROTECTION AGAINST ONLINE THREATS”**

I am Ismael Sowtall from Guinea Conakry, a Youth Delegate for Generation Connect ITU, and also a volunteer for the United Nations system in innovation and communication with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guinea. Over the past five years, I have received three awards (both national and from the UN system) for my local initiatives focused on digital innovation.

Firstly, I appreciate the theme "Digital Education for Youth and Protection against Online Threats," which remains more relevant than ever and crucial on the African continent, given the developments observed in other parts of the world. It is challenging to discuss protection against online threats without first addressing effective digital education for young people. In Africa, and specifically in Guinea, digital education is still largely overlooked by political forces, as evidenced by 80% of parents and teachers lacking proficiency in digital technology and its implications. Furthermore, 70% of university graduates are not initiated into computer science. The digital education of our youth represents a significant struggle.

1. Young people in Guinea face various challenges in accessing digital education. Obstacles include limited technological infrastructure, financial constraints hindering device purchases and internet access, and the need to train teachers in integrating technology into teaching. Inequalities between urban and rural areas exacerbate difficulties, with limited internet connectivity in rural areas. Marginalized youth, such as refugees or people with disabilities, can be particularly vulnerable, requiring additional support to overcome these barriers to digital education. Online resources are not always available in local languages, creating a linguistic challenge for those whose mother tongue is not French, the language of instruction.
2. Law 037, No. L/2016, concerning cybersecurity and the protection of personal data, aims to protect individuals' privacy, but its application is lacking. Efforts are made in this regard, but follow-up and continuity are also deficient. However, some international institutions, in partnership with the government, notably UNICEF, OHCHR, and ENABEL, are making efforts to support digital education.
3. The Guinean government is preparing legislation on telecommunications with a draft law on cybercrime and the protection of personal data. Although the stated goal is to combat cybercrime and ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of Guinean citizens online, concerns have been raised by Internet Sans Frontières. These concerns relate to violations of criminal law principles, insufficient judicial oversight for surveillance systems, and provisions that could lead to online censorship and the criminalization of whistleblowers. Regarding the protection of personal data, despite government measures, critics argue that the proposed provisions do not adequately address current and future challenges of the digital economy, emphasizing the need for more innovative regulations.
4. Gaps in protecting young people against online threats can result from outdated legislation, lack of awareness, and inequalities in access to digital education, particularly affecting marginalized youth. Potential measures to address these challenges include revising laws to adapt to new threats, raising awareness through educational campaigns, ensuring equitable access to digital education, establishing enhanced regulations on online privacy protection for youth, and collaborating with online platforms to implement specific safety policies for minors. These initiatives aim to ensure that young people are protected from online dangers while promoting inclusion and equal access.

**MY SOLUTION TO PROMOTE DIGITAL EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ENSURE THEIR PROTECTION FROM ONLINE THREATS.**

In Guinea, like in many parts of Africa, addressing the digital needs of young people and ensuring their protection from online threats requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach. Here are some potential solutions:

* **Digital Education Initiatives:** Implementing widespread digital education programs at both school and community levels is crucial. This includes training teachers, students, and parents in digital literacy, online safety, and the responsible use of technology.
* **Infrastructure Development:** Investing in technological infrastructure, especially in rural areas, is essential to bridge the urban-rural digital divide. This involves improving internet connectivity, providing affordable devices, and creating digital learning environments.
* **Language-Accessible Resources:** Ensuring that online educational resources are available in local languages is vital, as it caters to those whose primary language is not French, the language of instruction. This can enhance understanding and engagement among diverse linguistic communities.
* **Government Legislation and Regulation:** Strengthening and enforcing laws related to cybersecurity, data protection, and online privacy is crucial. The government should work on comprehensive legislation that not only protects individuals but also addresses emerging challenges in the digital space.
* **International Collaboration:** Collaborating with international organizations, NGOs, and foreign partners can provide support and resources for digital education initiatives. Organizations like UNICEF and OHCHR can contribute expertise and funding to enhance these efforts.
* **Community Engagement:** Engaging local communities, including parents, is vital. Community workshops, awareness campaigns, and partnerships with local organizations can promote understanding of online threats and how to mitigate them.
* **Innovation Hubs:** Establishing innovation hubs or centers for digital learning can serve as focal points for young people to access resources, receive training, and collaborate on innovative projects. These hubs can also serve as safe spaces for learning and creativity.
* **Mobile Technology:** Leveraging mobile technology for educational purposes can be effective, considering the widespread use of mobile phones in Africa. Educational apps and platforms can reach a broader audience, including those in remote areas.
* **Monitoring and Reporting Systems:** Implementing systems to monitor online activities, report cyber threats, and take appropriate actions is essential. This involves collaboration between government agencies, law enforcement, and internet service providers.
* **Public-Private Partnerships:** Forming partnerships between the government, private sector, and civil society can enhance the effectiveness of initiatives. Private companies can contribute resources, expertise, and technology to support digital education and online safety programs.

By combining these solutions and tailoring them to the specific needs of Guinea, it is possible to create a more resilient and secure digital environment for young people while fostering their educational development.