**Memorandum**

Date: July 11, 2022

To: Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

From: Cassandra Zavislak, WPS Project Specialist, Our Secure Future

Re: Call for submissions: Challenges to freedom of expression in times of conflicts and disturbances

The exclusion of women in the creation of the technology landscape and governance frameworks has created a security blind spot. This blind spot has caused the digital ecosystem to aggravate and sustain hatred, gender inequalities in society, and gender-based violence. However, this is a solvable problem. Through the integration of gender perspectives in technology and governance, we can find solutions to mitigate violence and erase this blind spot.

The digital ecosystem has become an unsafe platform for women, who often face harassment and threats of violence. As described in a report by Our Secure Future, [Gender Equality is Central to Technology and Democracy](https://foreignpolicy.com/sponsored/gender-equality-is-central-to-technology-and-democracy/), these acts are often coordinated. The report found that, “Online harassment, abuse and disinformation are used to silence women and prevent their participation in civic and political life.” This has resulted in online and offline public spaces where women feel unable to participate. Another Our Secure Future report, [The Urgent Case for Gender Equality in the Digital Age](https://fpanalytics.foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/13/the-urgent-case-for-gender-equality-in-the-digital-age/), highlights this digital divide and its impact on national security. As stated in the report, “According to the EIU, half of women believe the internet is a dangerous place to share their thoughts, a viewpoint that undermines security and social stability by discouraging women’s political and civic engagement.” When online violence prevents women from fully engaging online, democratic principles go unfulfilled, and democracies become insecure.

According to Sahana Dharmapuri, Director of Our Secure Future, and Jolynn Shoemaker, Fellow at Our Secure Future, [democracies should commit to the mainstreaming of gender analysis](https://foreignpolicy.com/sponsored/gender-equality-is-central-to-technology-and-democracy/) into existing mechanisms for dialogue and policymaking on the future of technology. “There are already mechanisms within the UN, OECD, and G7, as well as [Tech for Democracy](https://techfordemocracy.dk/), [Freedom Online Coalition](https://freedomonlinecoalition.com/), [Internet Governance Forum](https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/)… This [gender mainstreaming in technology and governance] should be a policy imperative for the U.S. and other democracies that have committed to gender equality principles.”

**The following reports by Our Secure Future were used to write this summary. It is recommended that these reports be read for further detail:**

Gender Equality is Central to Technology and Democracy

<https://foreignpolicy.com/sponsored/gender-equality-is-central-to-technology-and-democracy/>

Women, Peace and Security and the Digital Ecosystem

<https://oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/WPS%20Digital%20Ecosystem.pdf>

The Urgent Case for Gender Equality in the Digital Age

<https://oursecurefuture.org/research-analysis/urgent-case-gender-equality-digital-age>