



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

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Intervention by H.E. Bénédicte Linard, Minister of Culture,
Media, Women's Rights, Childcare and Health,
at the

**CSW67 - MRT B - "Fostering inclusive innovation and
technological change to empower women and girls and
create safer digital spaces"**

New York, 7/03/23 (11:30am)

Madame/Mister President,

Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- While the roots of gender-based violence are historically anchored in a patriarchal culture, with the society spending more and more time online, gender-based violence is also present in the digital sphere. And it is increasing. Online and tech-facilitated violence against girls and women is an extension of the violence they face in the 'physical' world. Because this new online world is largely beyond our control, this kind of violence against women and girls takes place on a scale previously unknown. We all need to step up for these victims and take action now.
- Women human rights defenders, women media workers or journalists and other women who speak out publicly are often at particular risk of threats and attacks based on their activities for women's and girls' enjoyment of human rights, especially in the digital sphere. Hate crimes and hate speech towards those groups have a tangible effect on their presence and result in a limited access to the democratic debate for women, girls and minorities.
- Sound legislative frameworks needs to be developed to tackle online gender-based violence. Belgium regards the fights against gender-based violence as a priority at the national and international level. Our national plan against gender-based violence adopted in 2021 adopts a holistic approach, is fully compliant with the landmark international instrument – the Istanbul

convention – and is developed hand in hand with civil society. For the first time, this National Plan focuses explicitly on online sexual violence. At different government levels, there are several other action plans that are also paying attention to online gender-based violence.

- While legislative guidelines are necessary, the origin of violence lies in a culture that must evolve. Education plays a crucial role in the affirmation of a society of gender equality in all areas of our social life, including the digital sphere. It is therefore important for schools to be a place where the uses of digital technology are inculcated with full respect for everyone, regardless of their gender.
- There is also a need to change gender stereotypes and change social norms which justify, normalize, accept, or perpetuate violence against women and girls and stigmatize survivors. There is a need to educate and raise awareness among digital natives, as well as our society as a whole, on the definition of consent online and offline. This can be done through media literacy and sex education courses.