**Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child**

**Part 1 (morning)**

**NIDHI**

**Main Statement - 1st Intervention**

Thanks for your kind introduction

MY NAME IS NIDHI AND it’s aN HONOUR TO ADDRESS SUCH AN AUDIENCE

Last December, I was fortunate enough to have gotten invited to take part in a panel discussion and speak at the Annual Internet Governance Forum on children’s online safety, particularly on Educational Technology apps and Children’s Data Privacy while using them. In preparation leading up to that event, I did my own research and listened to other panelists who shared their views. It was alarming to learn about the risks that we children are subject to, and how unsafe we are whilst using the internet.

As much as Data protection is a topic concerning adults, It is just as important, if not more, for children, especially now as we do anything and everything online.  1 in every 3 online users worldwide is a child. Most of the time, they don't even know how to use online tools safely or preserve their personal information, which makes them extremely vulnerable. It is estimated that 72 million pieces of personal data will be collected on every child around the world before their 13th birthday. This is just alarming.

It is evident that Digital companies through apps, online tools, social media, websites etc are constantly tracking and storing our data. Personal data like names, Birthdays, locations, time of usage, our likes and dislikes are all getting monitored and saved somewhere forever. Indeed, some of it might be used to enhance our digital experience, but increasingly we see that the information they collect and the purposes for which they get used, go much beyond simple promotion and content suggestions. This practice of collecting more data than what is required, I strongly believe, is unethical and a violation of children’s online space. Especially when we may not have intentionally signed up for this and probably don’t even understand the long-term consequences of giving away our personal information.

So, how do we know what our online data is being used for? Is it being sold to other third-party companies? How do we know the information we provide online is safe?

The most frustrating aspect of this issue is that most of the time it seems nothing can be done about it. For example, Terms and Conditions easily make it legal for companies to do whatever they please with a user’s data. T&Cs are to help users understand how their data is being used before they opt in, however increasingly, it is almost as if they are purposefully made to be unreadable, with complex and legal terms that dissuade users from reading fully. Many times, even if we read them, we don't understand what they mean. It is found that only 1% of digital users read the terms and conditions before they start using any new application. Just think about it, if even adults can’t read through these, how is it that children are expected to?

In addition, new technologies like AI used online are so advanced these days that even regulators are finding it hard to keep up with how data is collected from the users. As most big platforms are owned by the same digital companies, data collected is also used across platforms and now used for entirely different purposes. Companies use our data to recommend content that keeps us hooked on to the screens for much longer. When putting this in the context of children, this would mean they see things that they are not ready for and inadvertently lead them to explicit content.

I distinctly remember when I was about 9 years old, how scared I was when I saw a scary image while exploring a game on the internet. The image SCARRED me and while talking to my friends about this, I realised that many of them had the same experience that made us so afraid for years. This is an example of how children can accidentally get exposed to content that is inappropriate.

I find myself quite lucky to be in an environment where I get guidance and all the help needed to understand how to act safely in the online world; however, not all children have this privilege. Last year, I got this amazing opportunity to help the Somali Refugee community in Malaysia and volunteered at their community school. I realized that many children there, as much as they did not have access to the internet or devices, also had no knowledge whatsoever about online safety and how to be safe in the digital environment.

So, Mr High commissioner, I have a question for you Sir. how can underprivileged children, with no experience of how the online world works, trust that companies online will protect them and their data? What policies are in place for this and if such data is taken from children, how do we know that these kinds of companies will be dealt with?

thank you for you time and attention