MARIANA PANEL - FIRST MOMENT OF CONVERSATION

Good morning, a cordial greeting to all the people present, I am Mariana and I am very happy to be here. I am an Afro-descendant girl and I live in the middle of the mountains, in a rural territory, located in the south of Colombia, where the people are very friendly, we are a united community and the families have a lot of desire to move forward. However, there are situations that affect us a lot because there are people and armed groups that make us feel afraid.

In my town there are many girls and boys who are studying; however, we do not have access to technology that allows us to know and learn other ways of communicating with the world; an example of this was what we experienced during the COVID 19 pandemic, when girls and boys had to face the lack of access to the internet and technology. In my community, it is very difficult for our parents to buy us a phone or a tablet, let alone a computer, because the resources of the families are very scarce. During the pandemic I did not have virtual classes, the teachers sent us the workshops on paper, we did our homework and sent it to them, but I did not like it that way, it was very difficult to study and learn that way.

In my country Colombia, there is a lot of digital inequality; according to DANE1 which is an entity that compiles statistics in my country, in the big cities 70 out of every 100 families have internet access, while in rural areas like the one I live in, only 29 out of every 100 families have internet.

In addition, the public internet access points are in the big cities or in the municipalities, but where I live, there is not even a public library, there is only one in my municipality and it is in the municipal capital, where many times we can not go because the roads are not good and also because there is the presence of strange groups that control the roads. To solve this, with a group of friends we have an initiative to create a mobile library that can travel throughout our community.

On the other hand, with the project that I am part of, we have been identifying that in addition to having access to the Internet, it is important that we learn to make good use of technology and that we can identify when it can be dangerous for us.

I think that the rights of girls and boys in the digital environment require more attention from decision makers in my territory and in my country. My message today to the States is to give priority to educational institutions in the most remote areas, so that they can have Internet and technology such as Tablets or computers for each girl and boy; not as it currently happens in my school, where we must sit in front of a computer in groups of four students, which makes it more difficult to learn how to use them.

I think that governments should pay more attention to this situation, which especially affects rural areas, because in rural schools the Internet does not even exist. In addition, they need to train children more about technology and the importance of knowing how to use it properly because, on many occasions, children are exposed to pornography, bullying and sexual harassment, sometimes among classmates, sometimes by unknown people who are permanently present in the most remote regions and who are a risk for us children.

I also think that it is necessary to create policies that are useful for all girls and boys, that are inclusive and that, in addition, recognize our diversity. We need a total commitment from the States to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I ask myself: if technology and the Internet are part of the daily use of people all over the world, why is it that in territories like the one I come from, this right is still not possible for all children?

I am speaking today on behalf of all the girls and boys in my country, especially those of us who live in rural areas. In the future I dream of defending the rights of all people, that is why I want to be a lawyer, especially to defend the rights of girls, boys and women.

Because in the countryside there are girls and boys with dreams and desires to advance, like me, we just need a little push!

Before I finish, I would like to ask the High Commissioner two questions: what do you think about the lack of access to internet and technology that affects children in rural areas and remote communities, like the one I come from, and, on the other hand, what recommendations would you give to children about the proper use of technology? .... THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

THIRD MOMENT MARIANA CONCLUSIONS (AFTER THE SECOND ROUND OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION)

After listening to the High Commissioner, my colleague and the public; without a doubt, for me the main recommendation for all member states is to work on access issues and the reduction of the inequalities faced by many regions and remote territories.

If we manage to reduce the digital divide, we will ensure that children have access to the right to be informed, to participate, to be empowered, to learn, to communicate, to be in a safe environment, but most importantly: TO GROW UP IN A SAFE, CONNECTED WORLD.

SUMMARY PANEL (AFTERNOON SLOT)

Dear audience, I would like to share the main topics discussed during the morning panel.

The High Commissioner spoke about the importance of working on equal access to the Internet in a secure way and in coordination with the private sector. He also spoke about the importance of ensuring greater investment in access and knowledge on how to use technology in schools, communities and in our homes, in order to reduce the access gaps that exist today in many parts of the world and empower children. He also emphasized the importance of ensuring online safety and privacy.

My colleagues and I talked about the barriers to internet access faced by remote areas, the importance of promoting training on the use of technology, protecting children from the risks and inappropriate content that is shared on the networks and the importance of having terms and conditions that are easier to understand. Now my colleague Nidhi will tell you about the recommendations shared.