Statement on Digital Inclusion
Human Rights Council, Geneva
March 2020

Mrs. President,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Members of the Freedom Online Coalition. The full list of cosponsors will be placed on the [Human Rights Council] extranet'.

The Freedom Online Coalition unites 31 states who have committed to adoption and promotion of policies and practices, nationally and internationally, that promote the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms online, in particular freedom of expression, the right to privacy and the freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

The Freedom Online Coalition believes that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), in particular the Internet, provide a unique platform that enable individuals to exercise their human rights more fully. However, a persisting lack of digital inclusion prevents people from realizing the full potential and benefits provided by ICTs and thereby creates digital divides.

Discrepancies in access exist across demographics and abilities, including geography, area/location, gender, class, ethnic background and differently abled individuals. A lack of digital inclusion also affects those who already are connected. While the Internet and ICTs have the potential to empower, they also carry the risk of reinforcing existing social and economic inequalities.

Efforts by governments to address these negative implications must be consistent with international human rights obligations. Adopting human rights-based approaches to access is an important enabler of digital inclusion that both encourages open dialogue online while providing safeguards for vulnerable populations.

In line with recommendations made by the Freedom Online Coalition's statement on Digital Inclusion, long-lasting measures should be taken to address access and use of the Internet in order to address the multiple digital divides, including addressing underlying causes.

Building a digitally inclusive community characterized by meaningful access to ICTs and by digital literacy is a multi-faceted process that requires the involvement of both state and non-state actors backed by comprehensive and sustainable policies. These efforts will eventually lead to open and accessible platforms, which allow individuals to benefit from the countless opportunities offered by ICTs and exercise their human rights more fully online.

Thank you, Mrs. President.