

**Launch of Broadband Commission Working Group
on Gender report**

**Cyber Violence Against Women & Girls:
A Worldwide Wake-Up Call**

10am Thursday 24 September

Thank you to the Broadband Commission for inviting me to speak, and in particular thanks to Doreen from ITU for asking me to introduce iRights to you.

Several years ago, I made a film about teenagers and the Internet. I was curious to see how growing up with access to the entire world in your pocket – would change the experience of childhood. It was chilling.

Not chilling because it brought me face to face with 8 year olds watching pornography in the playground, horrific and sensational stories of bullying which ended in suicide, violent sexual transactions in exchange for smart phones or the ubiquitous compulsion to being online in paces and at times that cause anxiety and mental health problems. As upsetting as these scenario's were – they were familiar - and today's report speaks compellingly of the issues of cyber violence that come in their wake.

What brought ME up short was the *insidious* manner in which the technology was being deployed.

The experience was chilling – because in spite of our having spent decades articulating the rights and needs of children – we had - by putting smart phones in their pockets and computers in their pockets – not only exposed them to an unmediated adult world but also allowed that adult world ***unmediated access to them.***

With the advent of the ‘online childhood’ real world protections were suddenly circumvented. The provisions of the UNCRC, national legislation and cultural promises made to children had been superceded by a new world order where children cohabit with adults in a vast unregulated space,

A utopian might rejoice that the world of the internet treats us all the same. But for those concerned with the rights of children - It’s a problem.

Digital technology is not a communication tool or a toy. It is the ***organising*** technology of our world. A technology with declared value systems about everything from sharing information to free markets - but no adherence to the rights or special status of children.

Indeed – the culture of the digital world runs roughshod over their rights. The vast majority of platforms and sites are designed to gather data for commercial gain. Fundamentally contravening the right of young people to be protected from economic exploitation and their right to privacy. Terms and conditions encourage children in their

tens of millions to enter into agreements which they have no legal capacity to fulfill. Information about their health, their sexuality, their location, their likes and dislikes – build an aggregated un-contextualised digital profile – held in perpetuity to be used for purposes not yet invented – denying rights to self determination, free association or access to a diverse media.

Meanwhile compulsive ‘sharing’ of personal information fuelled by algorithms that act like steroids on key words and phrases – creates the perfect conditions for acts of public bullying, shaming, threats of violence and sexual violence - in a world - where slamming the front door behind you offers no protection or relief.

What happened to Article 19 of the UNCRC that sets out the requirement to take “all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence”? Or Article 16 that protects honour and reputation...

My list is illustrative not exhaustive – but the point is clear – children are growing up in a digital world not defined by kith, kin and culture – but defined by the needs of powerful global corporations and where social relationships have little context and no boundaries. ***And, crucially, a world in which a child is not treated as a child.***

It is imperative for the young to have access to the digital world – but it is simply unacceptable that their rights and our collective values are

not reflected in the structure of the digital technology they are using.

It is not a trivial matter. Yet we are fragmented and divided. Those who work for universal access, don't routinely worry about data, the maker movement passionate about digital creation don't always think about safety and the safety campaigners often fail to consider the inbuilt dangers of a technology designed to be compulsive – and all of us - in failing to take a holistic and unified approach – leave a generation of overwhelmed and under supported young people online.

So to iRights – (full text attached)

Our view is that children's rights must be hardwired into the structures of the digital world. A single universal framework of 5 rights - that - would if implemented as standard – transform the digital interactions of young people.

In brief...

The Right to REMOVE

Every child and young person should have the right to easily edit or delete all content they themselves have created.

This is not only about eliminating transgressions, it is about a child's right to privacy, to change as they mature and the right to own their own self determined history.

The Right to KNOW

We believe that children have a right to know who is holding or profiting from their information, what their information is being used for and meaningful control over it how it is copied, sold or traded.

The Right to SAFETY AND SUPPORT

We support the call in today's report for investment in cyber trained police. But for young people the greatest number of disturbing and upsetting interactions – are not illegal and many of the support mechanisms are slow, hidden and underfunded - out of sight and out of reach of most children and young people.

The Right to INFORMED AND CONSCIOUS CHOICES

The vast majority of online services are designed to extend use in order to collect data – which means they operate like a slot machines, giving small random rewards that keep young people online.

Deliberately orchestrating a young person's behaviour by technological means - for profit – contravenes multiple rights and all of our moral codes.

A young person who cannot leave their device alone – is tired, distracted, distanced from their context - and vulnerable if trouble

comes.

The Right to DIGITAL LITERACY

It is simply not the case that having two fast thumbs means you are in control. Understanding how to use technology is not the same as understanding the technology that you are using.

iRights defines digital literacy as; the skills to create and participate not simply consume; the knowledge to critique both the content and the structure of digital technologies; and the ability to negotiate and challenge changing social norms – which of course – includes challenging cyber violence.

And while digital and online technologies are a powerful tool of enfranchisement – it is the case that disadvantage off line is often mirrored and amplified online. Obstacles of gender, race, disability, socio economic position remain. The literacy that we advocate takes the specific needs of all these groups into account. Including training of women in tech and incorporating accessibility technology - in all cases.

The five iRights are the principle – but by their adoption we change our practice. Our signatories include major players across government, tech, media, law, education and civil society. And with them we are developing both technical and cultural mechanisms to

deliver the rights in real world settings. Crucially moving the responsibility from children to providers of services.

What has been exhilarating – is seeing the seemingly impossible unfolding – as they embed links to children’s support as standard, move the privacy settings next to the comment box, give their games ‘bed times’, offer their staff and the children of their staff digital training, make videos of women in tech and rewrite terms and conditions in language that a 12 year old could understand. In Scotland the First Minister recently set up a commission to work out how to be the first nation to deliver children’s digital iRights online and off equally.

I don’t doubt – those gathered in this room – understand the power of principle – in order to drive practice. Which is why I am asking the UN family to adopt iRights as the ‘principle’ of your digital interactions with the young and weave them into all that you do. *All* your programmes not just those that deal specifically with children.

And finally – I am abundantly aware that I have spoken about children who are already online – and not of the huge challenge and importance to get access for those who by geography, poverty, disability, culture or some other barrier are digitally disenfranchised. But as we find ourselves urgently having to now retrofit rights on behalf of the most advantaged young people in the most advantaged parts of the globe – it is worth noting – the temptation for vulnerable communities to trade rights for access.

Universal access is the goal – but we must make certain that children who come on line in the near future are fully supported digital citizens from the start.

As today's report admits, complex situations require complex solutions. But whilst we need young people to grow into respectful and self respecting adults to stem the flow of cyber violence to women and girls – so too – we need to deliver on our promises embodied in the UNCRC and our 'duty of care' to the next generation. Who, need rights – both on and off line – in order to create the conditions in which they can grow into 21stC digital citizens, creatively, knowledgably and fearlessly.

