CSW 67 Vienna Cafe
Elevator Pitch by Umika Panda

I am grateful to have this opportunity to be here with all of you today. My name is Umika and I'm from India. I am a youth delegate at the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and representing the Working Group of Girls.

I would like to acknowledge the many girls who are unable to be with us today due to their lack of access to digital technology, and the girls who are experiencing gender-based violence in their communities. Girl delegates to the CSW have identified a few areas of concern in the Zero Draft and CSW negotiations:

- Access and Infrastructure
- Gender Bias and STEM
- Awareness and education training
- Gender-based violence and safeguarding
- Leadership and Participation

I'd like to draw your attention to the issue of gender bias in STEM that leads to the underachievement of women and girls in these fields of study.

In India, under the previous education policies there was rigidity of 'streams' or combination of subjects in the State and private boards of education. It was largely divided into three options - Commerce, Humanities and Science streams, largely lacking the interdisciplinary approach to education. Women and young girls were automatically associated with "Humanities/Arts" as a stream through social conditioning and stereotypes. The men and boys were also consequently "expected" to pursue STEM. This is also because STEM is considered far more challenging so the perception was that women and girls would 'struggle' in these fields of study.

I felt this disparity at home itself where if someone needed help with a technological device or to change a light bulb, they would immediately ask my brother. As children, he received toy cars as gifts while I was given a set of dolls.

Perhaps another sociological factor to consider is that STEM studies in higher education has an expense factor. So parents are unwilling to invest in the education of women and girls as it would lead to delay in marriages. Years of this mindset has caused an evident gender gap in STEM entrance exams/enrolments/ industry and workforce even though this is changing. To overcome these stereotypes and encourage women to excel in these fields. These are a few suggestions:

- **Ensuring digital access** to facilitate education as well as training of women in STEM. **Vocational training programmes** specifically designed for girls pursuing STEM studies should be introduced, particularly in rural areas. It is also equally important to create awareness of the availability of such programmes among women and girls.
- **Introduction of adequate scholarships/grants/fellowship programmes** etc. to encourage women in research fields to financially support them. It is equally important to monitor that the beneficiaries are actually getting what they are entitled to under these schemes.
- The **ministries/governmental bodies for women's development** in member states have to collaborate with NGOs/civil society organisations etc. to actively campaign and promote careers in STEM for women.

Thank you for listening. The New Education Policy, introduced by the Indian government recently addresses this issue as well. I hope that you can take these key suggestions forward and consider them as you head into negotiations.