



**Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate Oral Statement to the
2023 Development Cooperation Forum on Strengthening Capacities to Overcome
the Digital Divide**

Good morning/afternoon!

Thank you for this opportunity to speak. I am Janet Palafox speaking on behalf of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate, a member of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, digital technology enabled some economies to continue functioning, and facilitated the global connection and participation of communities. However, not everyone was included. Our organizations work among the most vulnerable and neglected around the world, and we saw the negative impacts of Covid 19 and the lack of access to digital technology on their lives and livelihoods. The disruption caused untold personal and financial difficulties, especially for the thousands of people in the service and informal sectors who could not work from home.

In the current reality, every person requires equal access to the internet and to digital technology in order to participate fully in our world. Unequal access to the internet, inadequate infrastructure and digital education excludes people from vulnerable communities. The same people who are already excluded from the current financial systems. And we know a gender gap persists in both areas of financial and digital technology, with those excluded, predominantly women and girls.

Access to digital technology should be a fundamental human right. But access is not simply about adequate infrastructure or internet access; it also includes digital literacy, including, digital financial literacy. We therefore urge Member States to take measures to increase digital and financial literacy, including safety and numeracy among marginalized groups. In the absence of basic financial competence, enhanced access to technology among these users is worthless. Promoting such skills across diverse and often physically scattered populations requires multiple innovative approaches, for which civil society can provide strong leadership. What is needed is a host of partnerships between governments and civil society organizations, in which civil society and communities plays a leading role in creating and implementing new approaches and solutions.

To this end, an all-of-society approach must be adopted whereby the millions of people currently left behind in the development agenda are able to participate in designing, developing, and bringing knowledge to equitable, affordable, and sustainable solutions to global need for digital technology. Because every person excluded from the digital world is a person diminished in the development of their capacities and in their ability to participate actively and productively in society.