Short essay on social media use in Somalia.

Content creation on the internet is a fast-developing field and many industries are involved for a variety of different reasons; financial, political and education. In this short piece I have prepared for the Somali ICT community and online users. I want to share my thoughts on the use of social media tools and their impact on society in general and the youth in particular.

Before the internet, Somalis used to rely on radio and later on TV to get their news and share information. However, now many of our community members use the internet not for information gathering purposes only but also to create content, becoming producers as well as consumers. This has its advantages and disadvantages depending on the purpose and intention of the content that has been created or accessed.

From online learning and digital activism to the rapid expansion of high-paying tech jobs, the internet has generated unprecedented opportunities for us to educate ourselves and provide content that can help spread positive and constructive advice to all, especially as we rebuild our country from many years of civil war.

I would like to suggest empowering Somali women and girls. Encouraging them to learn internet tools to advance their knowledge and economic opportunities. This will give them a chance to lessen the new forms of inequality which is made possible by lack of Internet access. This inequality heightens threats to their rights and well-being, as well as lessen their opportunities to get jobs.

Somali women and girls in Somalia unlike their counterparts in the diaspora remain underrepresented across the creation, use and distribution of online content. They are less likely to use digital services or enter tech-related careers, and significantly more likely face online harassment and violence. This is mainly due to the high volumes of low-level and disturbing online content, especially on the social media produced by a lot of the Somalis in the diaspora. This needs to be changed and part of my campaign is to correct this trend. I am working on platforms where I am developing spaces for sharing positive, educational and ethically sound online content.

In the face of changing environment in Somalia where the government is becoming more stable and the economic situation is improving, we stand at a crossroads: to allow technology such as the internet to widen existing disparities and further concentrate power in the hands of the few or put it to work on behalf of a safer, more sustainable, more equitable future for all. Therefore, I would like to recommend enhancing the available opportunities for all Somalis in Somalia, particularly the women and girls in getting the necessary skills in the usage of Internet online services. This needs collaboration between academia, the government and the private sector.

To help Somalis economically succeed we must provide online programs to provide the necessary skills, focusing especially on groups most in danger of being left behind. Technology reflects its creators. So, when women and girls are left out of tech and innovation spaces, it's
no surprise that digital tools fail to meet the community needs. We have to create more inclusive, less biased tech start-ups with design and regulation processes rooted in the development of peace and equality in our society.

In the Internet online sphere, violent content will not help our youth who are already traumatised from real violence on the ground. This may also force many Somali women and girls to limit their desire to engage and participate virtually. As social media becomes an increasingly crucial space for both socialising and organising, we should aim towards making this a tool for educating ourselves and promoting peace.

Finally, I would like to recommend teaching digital citizenship and working towards making online content suitable for all. We must instil empathy and ethical digital media use, and teach our youth to become advocates for peace and equality via the content they create online. Universities and government authorities should engage the youth in this endeavour.

I want to thank the Internet Society Somalia Chapter for giving us this opportunity to share our ideas.