

Sister Teresa's speech  
9 February 2021  
New York, USA

The topic of our event today is: **“Digital Technology at the Service of Ending Homelessness.”**

This event is taking place in the context of the 59<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission for Social Development at the United Nations, with the theme: “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and wellbeing of all.” As people all over the world are trying to grapple with the unprecedented crises presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept “socially just transition” can provide a vision and a framework of principles, processes and practices to guide the role of digital technologies to create a compassionate, fairer and interconnected world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of digital transformation. Increasingly our lives are dependent on the digital world. We are witnessing a digital revolution and transformation; creative and innovative use of technology is providing access to services of every kind to improve the quality of life for many. On the other hand, the pandemic also revealed the widening digital divide, further exasperating existing inequalities.

This digital divide is highlighted by the fact that 93% of the world population live within the proximity of mobile, broadband/internet service. But only 53.6% of people use internet, leaving 3.6 billion people with no access. In low income countries only 19% have access. Here in the US alone 30 million have no broadband internet access.

The promise of social, political and financial inclusion can become a reality only when digital technologies are accessible and available to those left behind. We need a people centered approach in order to maximize the benefits of digital technology to foster social inclusion. The UN Secretary General states that, “Leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline.”

In this event, we will explore how technology is currently used by persons experiencing homelessness; how it is enabling them to connect with family and friends; access healthcare and other services; access skills trainings, find jobs and shelters. We will also explore how opportunities and benefits offered by new technologies can be harnessed to provide resources and services to persons surviving on the streets and to develop solutions for homelessness.

According to UN Habitat, there are approximately 150 million persons experiencing homelessness, globally. Another 1.6 billion live in inadequate housing. In the absence of reliable data on homelessness, we would like to see how technology can assist with data collection on homelessness. We need an inclusive networked world, for increased opportunities and participation for homeless people and restore their dignity and end homelessness.

During major transitions, it is important to keep the concepts of human rights and justice in focus.