



Statement at Side event: Safe Spaces, Everywhere: Centering Women and Young Persons with Disabilities in Ending Gender-Based Violence in the Physical and Digital World

**By: Carolina Diaz
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Carolina Díaz. I am a journalist, disability rights advocate, and a neurodivergent woman from Peru. I am autistic and bipolar, and much of my work focuses on building community for neurodivergent young people and people with psychosocial disabilities.

When we talk about gender-based violence against women with disabilities, we often think about violence that happens in homes, institutions, schools, workplaces, or public spaces. These conversations are essential. But today, I would like to speak about a form of violence that is still too often overlooked: digital violence.

For many people with disabilities and neurodivergent people, the internet can be a deeply democratic space. It removes barriers that many of us face offline. It allows us to connect with others, access information, build community, share our experiences, and participate in public conversations.

For many of us, online spaces were the first places where we could speak in our own voices and be heard.

The internet opened a door that had long been closed to many women with disabilities.

But too often, when we walk through that door and begin to speak, we are punished for doing so.

As a woman who speaks publicly about disability, neurodivergence, and mental health, I have experienced harassment, bullying, campaigns of discreditation, and even death threats.

What strikes me is that these attacks are often both gendered and disability-specific.

As an autistic woman, I am often infantilised. People question my diagnosis. They tell me I do not look autistic, or that I cannot possibly understand the issues I speak about.

As a bipolar woman, I am told that I am unreliable, unstable, or incapable of making sound judgments. My views are dismissed not because of what I am saying, but because of assumptions about my mental health.

Sometimes it feels as though there is no way to win.

And I know I am not alone.

I have seen the same patterns repeated across countries, languages, and disability communities. I have seen women with disabilities subjected to coordinated harassment, public humiliation, bullying, and relentless scrutiny simply for sharing their experiences or advocating for their rights.

What concerns me most is not only the harm caused to individual women.

It is the chilling effect.

I have seen women with disabilities withdraw from advocacy, stop sharing their experiences, leave public conversations, or decide not to pursue leadership roles because the abuse became too overwhelming.

When this happens, we do not just lose individual voices. Our movements lose leaders.

And before that happens, there is often a long period of exhaustion.

Digital violence does not stay online.

It follows us into our homes, our work, our relationships, and our mental health.

Many of us are already carrying the weight of trauma, discrimination, exclusion, or previous experiences of violence. The constant hostility, harassment, and scrutiny can become overwhelming.

It affects our wellbeing. It affects our sleep. It affects our sense of safety.

Sometimes it becomes physical.

The stress lives in our bodies. It becomes tension, pain, fatigue, anxiety, hypervigilance, and burnout.

It can leave us feeling isolated, hopeless, and questioning whether it is worth continuing to participate at all.

That is why digital violence cannot be dismissed as "just words."

Because digital violence does not stay online.

It shapes who feels safe to speak, who remains visible, who takes on leadership roles, and who ultimately disappears from public life.

Words can silence.

Words can isolate.

Words can push people out of public life.

Digital violence is not only about hurtful comments or offensive messages. It is about limiting participation. It is about restricting leadership. It is about making women with disabilities feel that public life is not meant for us.

If we are serious about ending gender-based violence against women and girls with disabilities, we must also take digital violence seriously.

We need policies, reporting mechanisms, and digital safety measures that recognise the specific forms of abuse faced by women with disabilities.

We need platforms to address harassment that targets disability and gender simultaneously.

But we also need something else.

We need community.

One of the most powerful protections against violence and isolation has been finding other people with disabilities and neurodivergent people who understand these experiences.

Spaces where we can support one another, share strategies, validate what is happening, and remind each other that we do not have to carry this alone.

Because resilience should not depend solely on individual strength.

Safety is something we build collectively.

Digital spaces should not be places where women with disabilities are punished for participating.

They should be places where we are safe to contribute, to lead, and to belong.

Thank you.
