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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA)**, Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:
Women and Technology: Increasing Opportunity and Driving
International Development
November 17, 2015

(As prepared for delivery)

This hearing will come to order.

Around the world, women and girls are often the hardest hit by poverty. At the same time, empowering women can be the best way to lift them and their families out of poverty. As our guest Geena Davis has said, “Believing in yourself is the greatest gift.”

Today, few tools have the potential to empower women and girls like the internet. Whether it is access to an online education, job opportunities or an expanded social network, the internet can dramatically increase a woman’s access to information and opportunity.

A recent survey in four developing countries found that, of those women who reported using the internet, over 75 percent said they did so to “further their education.” Many women surveyed also noted that the internet and other mobile applications dramatically reduced the time and cost associated with tasks like learning about health concerns, arranging transportation, or borrowing and saving money. Just ask the female fisherman in Kenya, who now uses a popular mobile service to store and transfer money using just her cell phone – protecting her business savings from theft and enabling her to spend money as she chooses.

Yet while we take the Internet for granted, more than 4 billion people - or two-thirds of the world’s population – still lack access to it. And women are more likely to be offline than men – across the developing world, 200 million fewer women have access to the Internet than men. The disparity is particularly great in parts of Asia and the Middle East, and in sub-Saharan Africa – where women are almost half as likely as men to be online.

This means women are being excluded from one of the most powerful drivers of personal and economic opportunity of all time. This is a problem for more than just those women who are left out. It means that families, communities, states and institutions are held back, as well.

Study after study has shown that women spend more of their income on their families and communities, prioritizing things like food, medicine and education, and improving outcomes for their children. And in terms of broader economic growth, reducing the disparity in women’s online access has been estimated to boost GDP by four to five billion dollars.

So it seems clear that failing to include women in the technology revolution is a big mistake.

Likewise, failing to consider technology in our aid and diplomacy remains another costly oversight. The Internet is fast becoming as essential to a country’s economic growth as

electricity, ports and the rule of law. That is why the Committee is developing legislation to ensure Internet access is a priority in U.S. development projects. For one, our aid agencies could better coordinate to lay fiber optic cable under roads being constructed in the developing world.

In addition to having equal access to technology, it is important for women to have equal access to creating that technology. Globally, there are fewer women than men in science, technology, engineering and math – or STEM – careers. However, there are some countries that have succeeded in having at least 50% of their STEM degrees awarded to women – countries like the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Bulgaria. We need to address what is holding women back from entering the sciences in so many other countries, including ours, I'd add.

The Internet has changed the way we buy, sell, educate, and socialize. It has transacted more international commerce than any other marketplace, with trillions of dollars pumped across the net daily. It's a tremendous opportunity – for those that have access to it. This hearing will help us understand what is needed so that more, especially women, can take advantage of this revolutionary technology, and in the process bring a better life for their families and communities.

I now turn to the Ranking Member for any opening comments he may have.