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Statement on behalf of civil society

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Thank you Mr. chairman and good morning to all distinguished speakers and delegates. I would like to thank CSTD for the invitation to be here.

Among the important topics on the agenda of the meeting that starts today, two of them deal with institutions and with enhancing procedures, and I would like to focus on them: the first is the report about improvements to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF); the second is a review of what is the status quo and what should be the way forward for the implementation of a mechanism of enhanced cooperation on public policy issues related to the Internet.

I believe this is an opportune moment to discuss institutions. In other areas, such as the global financial regime, we have witnessed the consequences of lack of adequate frameworks and regulation. Their absence has thrown the world in an economic crisis that has deteriorated the lives of populations worldwide. The crisis has also unleashed centrifugal forces in international relations, which pose a threat to some of the processes of cooperation that the international community has so laboriously built.

The Internet governance regime is still young and experimental and it is gaining shape on the current delicate moment. There are two possible ways for us to proceed with the discussion about institutions and IG: we can let discussions be subdue by these centrifugal forces, or, we can make Internet governance an example of cooperation that could inspire other regimes seeking for fresh ways of creating synergy among governments and with non-governmental actors.

Nevertheless, in order to be able to follow this more productive path, we need to overcome some tendencies of fragmentation in Internet governance.

The first of them is a regulatory fragmentation between nations. In the absence of a global platform for the discussion of IG issues, we notice, particularly on the North of the globe, the emergence of plurilateral and regional processes for discussion and decision-making of issues related to the Internet. This leads to an asymmetric regime: while many developing countries are focused on achieving access to the Internet, other countries are giving shape to important policies such as e-commerce, intellectual property and online digital enforcement, and, by doing that, they are narrowing down policy options for developing countries in the future. A common multistakeholder space for the development of policies could an option to avoid fragmentation, and, in my view, this is what enhanced cooperation should be about.

The second tendency points to an institutional fragmentation. The IGF is currently the only forum where stakeholders can participate and exchange opinions on global policy issues. It is a rich forum in terms of content. But its discussions have not satisfactorily impacted on the global ones. The report on IGF improvements makes suggestions to overcome this deficit that currently isolates the IGF from other bodies. Therefore, this report needs to be implemented expeditiously.

The third fragmentation we need to avoid is a fragmentation of the constellation of actors that have a stake on the IG. All the actors, regardless of their economic power, should be given the opportunity to participate. On the context of the IGF, and of CSTD, this means, among other things, to provide adequate funding for actors from developing and less-developed countries. In the context of the ITU it means, most of all, to provide access to relevant documents of public interest regardless of the payment of fees, such as the preparatory documents of the World Conference on International Telecommunications. Outside the UN realm, several high level meetings about IG have taken place recently with the exclusion of non-governmental actors or with very limited channels for their participation, and this problem also needs to be addressed.

Of course, I am not talking about lack of participation from big players in those meetings. Big players have economic power and they always find their way into the processes. Governments have been receptive to their participation as we see in Davos or in the Internet G8 meeting in Deauville. I am actually referring to the participation of small players, small businesses, civil society, of marginalized groups. It is their participation that gives real substance to multistakeholderism and avoids that multistakeholderism becomes a façade for elitism.

The cost of not involving these other actors can certainly be measured in terms of financial loss, or, in other words, by the cost of less efficient, less sound policy, of policies that do not take into account the inputs that only actors on grassroots level could provide. But there is another kind of cost from this lack of involvement that is usually overlooked, which is the cost of loss of harmony. Below the visible surface, the several crisis that we face today, from the financial to the environmental crisis, are deeply rooted in our inability to interact harmoniously with one another and with everything else that surrounds us.

In the Internet governance regime, by getting out of our silos and finding common keys for dialogue we have achieved some degree of harmony. Harmony is a valuable asset and it is based on the openness and the opportunities for participation that we have created so far. We cannot lose this asset, particularly on the present moment, since it can help us avoid fragmentation by the aforementioned centrifugal forces that currently impact so many global issues.

To conclude, multilateral and multistakeholder institutions that follow clear and predictable procedures are the best way to ensure that the voices of the less powerful are heard; Therefore, the agenda of this present session is of paramount importance. In addition, discussing institutions is an exercise that can make us focus on common concerns that we share, and this may help us approximate our goals for the future. I hope we take the opportunity of this meeting to strengthen global internet governance, to make it a reference in terms of cooperation and to foster the principles that underlay this regime- including multilateral democracy and multistakeholder participation - and I hope that we do so in a harmonious spirit.

Thank you.