UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD), eighteenth session

Geneva, 4-8 May 2015

Item 2: Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to WSIS outcomes at the regional and international levels - Substantive session on the ten-year review

Statement submitted by

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Tuesday, 5 May 2015

UK Statement on the WSIS Review

Good morning. Thanks to the secretariat for an excellent presentation.

The UK welcomes this thorough and important ten year report:

- it draws on the contributions of a very wide range of stakeholders as well as reflecting the discussions we have had in CSTD.
- Importantly, it provides a balanced view and fully reflects the different perspectives that stakeholders have brought to bear
- its conclusions are firmly grounded in evidence – an really impressive foundation of factual analysis and information
- it provides a thorough assessment across all the WSIS Action Lines
- and its recommendations are based on a clear analysis of the changes in the ICT landscape, the challenges we face now and in the future and the experience of what works.

We think it is a landmark achievement in WSIS process and it will be an invaluable assistance to the UN General Assembly as it reviews WSIS later this year.

The ten year report sets out just how much has been achieved over the last ten years.

- the capacity of ICTs have increased thirty times
- the number of mobile phone subscriptions is equal to the number of people on the planet.
- 4 out of 10 people use the Internet, and that number is growing

It is clear that the digital divide in access to basic ICTs is being reduced.

This is thanks to the dynamism of private sector investment responding to consumer demand and also because governments have helped create stable and proportionate regulatory environments, promoting competition and market liberalisation, which encourage private sector investment in ICTs.

But as Mr Banerjee from UNESCO reminded us yesterday, ICTs are powerful enablers, but they are not ends in themselves.

The aim of WSIS is to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, that will enhance opportunities and quality of life for people worldwide and facilitate sustainable development.

That is an inspiring and ambitious aim and one the UK remains fully committed to.

So we also strongly welcome the emphasis in the ten year report on addressing environmental concerns, education and access to knowledge, a diverse media and freedom of expression, gender equality issues, and the importance of local language content and local services, particularly in marginalised communities.

The report sets out five key challenges facing us as we look to the future:

- the digital divide in broadband provision: as opportunities accelerate, there is a danger that some will be left behind – there is much more to do here
- the unpredictability of new technological developments
- mainstreaming ICTs into broader social and economic agendas
- education and capacity building
- effective monitoring and measurement

We have learnt much over the last ten years about

- attracting private sector investment and the importance of strong public-private partnerships
- lowering prices by breaking up monopoly provision and encouraging competition and
- promoting education and capacity building to transform the ability of communities to harness the benefits of ICTs.

All stakeholders need to continue to apply those lessons, working together, if we are to make sure that no community and no country is left behind.

We believe that the report gives a comprehensive overview of recent discussions on Internet governance. We do not agree with all the views set out in the report, but we accept that it gives a balanced picture.

The report rightly highlights the concern that discussion about Internet governance should not inhibit discussion of how the positive impact that the Internet can have on development.

In our view, the focus of the WSIS review should be on practical support on development issues that will allow people particularly in developing countries to get online and make the most of the opportunities that ICTs offer.

On enhanced cooperation, we accept that, although we may not agree with all the views reflected in the report, it does give a balanced view of the discussions on enhanced cooperation that have taken place in CSTD and elsewhere. It fully incorporates the discussion took place at the intersessional meeting.

In our view, the CSTD Working Group on this issue identified many examples of enhanced cooperation that are currently underway. Enhanced cooperation is happening now – and it will continue to develop.

The Internet is constantly innovating and developing. New challenges will emerge as older issues are tackled. In our view, enhanced cooperation needs to continue to be a flexible process involving all stakeholders if it is to be able to respond effectively to this pace of innovation and change.

The report reflects the value attached to multi-stakeholder participation and notes that "the IGF… has become an important part of international discourse on the Internet".

We support the work currently underway to improve the IGF.

Our view is that the IGF should continue to be strengthened and its mandate should be extended for a further ten years.

Finally, we would like to emphasise our strong support for the comments that have been made about ensuring alignment between WSIS and the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

The President of ECOSOC talked powerfully about the need for policy integration and a single universal framework for development.

We strongly agree and the 10 year review of WSIS is a critical opportunity to achieve that.

We are pleased that work is underway to map the WSIS Action Lines and the Sustainable Development Goals, helping to ensure that all stakeholders are working together in a concerted way to achieve a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society.

And we look forward to working with colleagues in that endeavour.

Thank you.