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Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels

Report of the Chair of the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation*

Executive summary

This report has been prepared by the Chair of the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation. It gives a brief account of the implementation of paragraph 65 of the General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/125 in which the General Assembly requested the Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, through the Economic and Social Council, to establish a working group to develop recommendations on how to further implement enhanced cooperation as envisioned by the Tunis Agenda, taking into consideration the work that has been done on this matter thus far. The working group held five meetings from September 2016 to January 2018. During these meetings, the group discussed inputs from Member States and other stakeholders, as stipulated by the General Assembly. Although sometimes consensus seemed to emerge on some issues, significant divergence of views in a number of other issues persisted, including with respect to what should be the nature, purpose and scope of the process towards enhanced cooperation. In that context, as was the case with the 2013-2014 WGEC, the complexity and political sensitivity of the topic did not allow the group to agree on a set of recommendations.

* This document has been submitted by the Chair of the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation and is being circulated as received.



1. The Outcome document of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Overall Review of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (resolution A/RES/70/125), addresses the topic of enhanced cooperation in the following terms:

“4.1. Enhanced Cooperation

64. We acknowledge that various initiatives have been implemented and some progress has been made in relation to the process towards enhanced cooperation detailed in paragraphs 69 to 71 of the Tunis Agenda.

65. We note, however, the divergent views held by Member States with respect to the process towards implementation of enhanced cooperation as envisioned in the Tunis Agenda. We call for continued dialogue and work on the implementation of enhanced cooperation. We accordingly request the Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, through the Economic and Social Council, to establish a working group to develop recommendations on how to further implement enhanced cooperation as envisioned in the Tunis Agenda, taking into consideration the work that has been done on this matter thus far. The group, which shall be constituted no later than July 2016, will decide at the outset on its methods of work, including modalities, and will ensure the full involvement of all relevant stakeholders, taking into account all their diverse views and expertise. The group shall submit a report to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development at its twenty-first session for inclusion in the annual report of the Commission to the Council. The report will also serve as an input to the regular reporting of the Secretary-General on implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society.”

2. At the nineteenth session of the CSTD in May 2016, the Commission noted the proposal by the Chair of the CSTD on the structure and composition of the working group, which was subsequently endorsed by the ECOSOC. The Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation (WGEC) was composed by twenty-two Member States and twenty members from the private sector, civil society, technical and academic communities, and intergovernmental and international organisations. Ambassador Benedicto Fonseca Filho, from Brazil, was elected Chair of the Working Group.

3. The group held five face-to-face meetings, organised by the CSTD secretariat in Geneva, between September 2016 and January 2018: 30 September 2016; 26-27 January 2017; 3-5 May 2017; 25-27 September 2017; and 29-31 January 2018. In order to facilitate participation of all stakeholders remote participation and live captioning were made available.¹ In line with the request made by the UNGA to take into consideration the work that has been done on this matter thus far, WGEC members and observers referred extensively to previous processes and documents on enhanced cooperation and WSIS-related topics.

4. At its first organizational meeting, the group decided on its methods of work, and agreed on two questions that should guide subsequent discussions, namely (i) “What are the high level characteristics of enhanced cooperation?” and (ii) “Taking into consideration the work of the previous WGEC and the Tunis Agenda, particularly paragraphs 69-71, what kind of recommendations should be considered?”, and invited contributions from Governments and all stakeholders within and beyond the WGEC membership. Following the request of the group the Secretariat posted the questions through a dedicated Working Group mailing list as well as online. A total of 37 contributions to the guiding questions were received and made available on the website of the group as inputs for its second meeting.

¹ The funding of these services by ICANN is gratefully acknowledged.

5. At the second meeting of the group, WGEC participants highlighted elements of their contributions and exchanged views on the contributions. The Group held an initial discussion on what should be the high level characteristics of enhanced cooperation on the basis of the responses to the first question agreed during its first meeting and on an analysis document prepared by the Chair. Due to time limitations the Chair proposed to the Group to have a more focused discussion on the proposed recommendations during the third meeting and invited contributors of recommendations to revise the compilation document circulated during the meeting in order to ensure that their proposals were properly reflected and to submit amended or additional proposals of recommendations, if necessary, in preparation for the third meeting.

6. During its third meeting, the WGEC took note of a document which was previously circulated by the Chair with a synthesis of the discussion on high level characteristics which was held at the second meeting. It also heard the presentation of the new/revised recommendations submitted by twelve contributors in response to the call made by the Chair and discussed said proposals. The discussion was focused on the proposals around which consensus seemed more likely to emerge, as well as on proposals for which consensus appeared difficult such as those concerning whether there is a need for the development of a new institutional mechanism for enhanced cooperation, including through the intergovernmental format. In addition, during this meeting the WGEC briefly discussed the outline of what should be its report. The Chair suggested continuing this discussion at a later stage and invited WGEC members and observers to reflect on the discussions held during the meeting and to carry out intersessional work to refine their proposals with a view to combining/merging these wherever possible in preparation for the fourth meeting.

7. At the fourth meeting the WGEC discussed the structure and format of the report that should be submitted to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development at its twenty-first session. Upon resuming discussion on the proposed recommendations, the WGEC initially considered new/revised proposals submitted in the intersessional period on the basis of a compilation document prepared by the Secretariat. In the sequence, WGEC members and observers who had submitted proposals to previous WGEC meetings but had not yet had the opportunity to present and discuss them were invited to do so. At the end of the meeting the WGEC decided on a timeline for intersessional work in preparation for its fifth meeting.

8. At its fifth and final meeting, the WGEC undertook a first reading of the draft report submitted by the Chair. Several proposals for amendments were made by WGEC participants. Although several areas of divergence persisted, the Chair offered to prepare a revised draft on the basis of discussions held. He indicated, however, that in order to elaborate such a document for the subsequent consideration of the WGEC, he would need to receive further guidance on two specific sets of issues and in that context called for additional debate on (i) proposals for recommendations with regard to the creation of a new institutional mechanism and (ii) proposals for recommendations regarding possibilities for expanding the roles of the UNGA and/or CSTD/ ECOSOC, on the one hand, and for fostering the complementarity relationship between the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the process towards enhanced cooperation, on the other hand. The group discussed the two proposed set of issues and subsequently considered the revised Chair's proposal of a draft report in regard to which several proposals of amendments were again made. The group then engaged in extensive discussions on possible formulations that might lead to an overall agreed text, including a mix of plenary sessions and informal meetings. In the end, the group recognised, however, that it would not be possible at that point in time to finalize a set of recommendations in the light of persistent differences, including in regard to what should be the nature, the objectives and the scope of the process towards enhanced cooperation. On that account, the group decided not to submit recommendations to the twenty-first session of the Commission on Science and Development (CSTD).

9. It should be noted, nonetheless, that the Working Group's proceedings generated a substantial amount of information that has been duly documented and can be resorted to through the dedicated webpage established by the CSTD Secretariat, including the full text of all proposals made by WGEC members and observers and transcripts of each session.² By allowing access to in-depth reflection on the part of WGEC participants on several and relevant aspects of the discussion related to the efforts needed to further implement enhanced cooperation as envisioned by the Tunis Agenda, these resources may constitute useful references for future similar efforts.

² See <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/CSTD/WGEC-2016-to-2018.aspx>