CONCLUSION TO THE CSTD TEN-YEAR REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WSIS OUTCOMES

Submitted by

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Response of United States:

How far do you consider the implementation of specific WSIS outcomes to have been achieved?

Enormous progress has been made since the two Summits towards building the people-centered, inclusive development-oriented information society called for in the WSIS Declaration of Principles.

With almost as many mobile phone subscriptions as people in the world, for the first time in human history, people worldwide can communicate with one another. Mobile technology has helped the world to meet one of the WSIS goals - to ensure that by 2015 “more than half of the world’s inhabitants have access to ICTs within their reach” - and thus has effectively narrowed the digital divide with respect to voice communications. Equally significant is the gain in Internet use since the 2003 WSIS in Geneva. For example, subscription to fixed wired broadband service rose from 220 million in 2005 to 696 million in 2013 -- a gain of about 9% compound annual growth rate (CAGR). Similarly, the number of individuals using the Internet increased from 1.024 billion in 2005 to 2.749 billion in 2013, a CAGR of approximately 8%. Both developed and developing countries have experienced increased use of mobile broadband technologies and related applications in trade, government, health, environment, and education.

In the last few years, the emergence of new services, including social networks and cloud computing, has also increased the means to access and distribute information. Social networks have revolutionized the way content is created and consumed. These networks have made it possible for end users to create and distribute content locally that in many instances has significant social and political effects. Cloud computing has enabled end users to access services without investing in hardware, thus reducing the cost of access.

Much progress has been made with respect to enhanced multistakeholder cooperation in Internet governance since 2005. Enhanced cooperation is evolutionary and has been implemented on a broad, global scale. Much like the goals and objectives of the WSIS, enhanced cooperation is an on-going endeavor. Examples of progress include:

- The creation and eight annual meetings of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which have contributed greatly to global, multi-stakeholder dialogue on Internet issues and have catalyzed the proliferation of national and regional IGFs around the world that bring the dialogue on these important issues to the local level.

- In 2009, the United States executed the Affirmation of Commitments with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). This agreement provides a model of enhanced cooperation by establishing mechanisms and timelines for the multi-stakeholder review of ICANN’s performance of its core tasks. What had once been a unique role for the U.S. government has been expanded to include the participation of the international – and multi-stakeholder – community through review processes.

- In 2010, ICANN and UNESCO signed a memorandum of understanding to support the introduction of top-level Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) in order to offer new opportunities and benefits for Internet users around the world by allowing them to establish and use domains in their native languages and scripts. Currently there are 32 country code TLD IDNs.
in the root zone files, representing 22 countries and territories and 15 languages.

**What are the challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes? What are the challenges that have inhibited the emergence of a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society"?**

The United States is aware of several challenges that have been identified in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines. One of such challenges is access to the Internet and broadband services.

The United States believes that much of the gains with respect to Internet and broadband have been uneven. Almost two thirds of the world’s population -- especially in developing and least developed countries -- still lack access to Internet. They have yet to realize the benefits of broadband services and information and communication technologies (ICT). In parts of our own Americas region according to one estimate, only 29% of the population has access to broadband. For many in developing countries, lack of last mile coverage, infrastructure that is capable of supporting voice and content, and affordability are some of the impediments to broadband access. Despite these impediments the United Nations Broadband Commission reported that a majority of countries have met its target of offering basic fixed-broadband services at below 5% of monthly per capita Gross National Income.

The United States remains committed to expanding the reach of broadband domestically and internationally. Considering broadband and ICTs important role in development --both as an important measure of progress in their own right, and as a facilitator for achieving development milestones, as recognized in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -- the United States believes that increasing access and use of ICTs including broadband and mobile services should be the primary focus for WSIS for the next 10 years.

Increased access to broadband is widely credited with improving development outcomes, fostering economic development and increasing competitiveness. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank reports that a 10% increase in the region’s broadband subscriptions would increase GDP and productivity by 3.19% and 2.6% respectively.

The Americas region has long recognized that access to broadband is critical for development. The 2012 Summit for the Americas was instrumental in elevating the awareness of broadband as a catalyst for economic growth in our region. In addition, the importance of broadband for our region is reflected in the outcomes of the Fourth Ministerial Conference on the Information Society (Montevideo, Uruguay, April 2013) and the 2012 Summit of the Americas (Cartegena, Colombia), among others.

**How are these challenges being addressed? What approaches have proved to be effective in your experience?**

To promote widespread affordable access to the Internet, countries must enable policy and regulatory environments that are fair, transparent, stable, predictable, and non-discriminatory. Policies should promote competition, support innovation in technologies and services, incorporate education and training programs, and incentivize private sector investment. Further, efforts need to be made to foster an increasingly educated and skilled workforce around the world so that the developing and least developing
countries can find ways to become creators and suppliers of Internet services, applications, content, and code, not merely consumers of those provided by others.

In addition, the policy recommendations for encouraging broadband infrastructure development contained in the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Digital Development report can also contribute to affordable Internet connectivity in developing countries. The recommendations are for governments to:

1) Provide policy leadership for investment, including open consultations on necessary policy and legal frameworks;
2) Open telecommunications markets to competition through licensing and taxation reforms, including transparent licensing regimes;
3) Enable government services that will stimulate demand for and investment in telecommunications, especially in developing countries;
4) Establish a universal service program to support telecommunications infrastructure investment; and
5) Encourage efficient and innovative mobile broadband practices for new market entrants and consumers.

These recommendations warrant additional observations. Whereas mobile telephony is most often relied upon for local in-country calls, with the Internet, the majority of the traffic is international. Under such circumstances it is more practical to establish in-country Internet Exchange Points (ISPs) to keep local in-country traffic in country, as well as to ensure market pricing for international connectivity. Often international links are held by a single firm or small consortium that gives them favor over their competition, with the prices being higher than would otherwise be required. ISPs would help change the business environment to move more and better services at lower cost to the people who need them most.

Another key consideration is the development of locally relevant content—creating the on-line value that pulls demand onto the expanding Internet. The rapidly evolving market of cloud services, portable, personal devices and advanced software applications will power a new generation of local content as more citizens gain access to the Internet at affordable cost.

An additional key issue is the adoption of effective Universal Service Funds by the government, and the adoption of newer technologies by the commercial carriers. Combined, these provide an incentive to expand the reach to rural populations through less costly solutions; for many countries, often over 50% of their population is rural and marginalized and have the least financial resources to afford access.

A focus going forward on advancement of ICTs is consistent with the sentiment reflected by Ministers at the WSIS Forum 2013, where the Ministerial Roundtable concluded that “[t]here is an urgent need to ensure that development angle of the WSIS remains at the central point of discussions paving the way for accelerated implementation of the WSIS objectives.” (Report on Main Outcomes by the Chairman of the Ministerial Roundtable at the WSIS Forum 2013.)

What do you consider the most important emerging trends in technology and other aspects of ICTs which have affected implementation of WSIS outcomes since the Summit? What has been their impact?
The United States believes that the guiding principles of the Geneva Declaration and associated Plan of Action are as relevant today as they were in 2003. Over the past decade, these broad principles and Plan of Action were able to accommodate rapid and constantly changing information and communication technologies and infrastructure. The transitions from fixed to mobile communications, from “narrow-brand” to broadband, from stand-alone to converged networks, from public switched telephone networks to Internet Protocol (IP) based networks, and the emergence of cloud computing have profoundly changed the technology and infrastructure of ICTs. These developments, although not anticipated in the WSIS outcome documents, in many instances have helped to usher in a “people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information society” sooner than many have expected. We believe any revisions to the action lines based on narrow objectives that favor certain technologies, services, and applications over others may thwart innovation and therefore slow progress. Considering that the WSIS goals remain relevant and progress is an evolutionary process, the United States believes that all relevant stakeholders should focus on re-doubling their effort to meet the current WSIS objectives and goals in the future.

14. **What role should information and communications play in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda?**

The United States believes that ICTs will play an important role in the post 2015 development agenda. A focus going forward on advancement of ICTs is consistent with the sentiment reflected by Ministers at the WSIS Forum 2013, where the Ministerial Roundtable concluded that “[t]here is an urgent need to ensure that development angle of the WSIS remains at the central point of discussions paving the way for accelerated implementation of the WSIS objectives.” (Report on Main Outcomes by the Chairman of the Ministerial Roundtable at the WSIS Forum 2013.)

We, however, concur with the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) observation that advancement of ICTs alone is not sufficient to achieve development goals rather, “[s]trategic policies, human capacity, appropriate knowledge management, relevant content development, infrastructure deployment, and enabling environment are critical factors to ensure that the potential of ICTs for sustainable development is fully harnessed by and for all.”