

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Mustafa Osman Ismail Elamin
Permanent Representative of Sudan,
On behalf of the African Group,**

AGENDA ITEM 2 (b): INDUSTRIAL POLICIES AND PRODUCTIVE CAPACITIES FOR A DIGITAL ECONOMY

Mr. President,

On behalf of the African Group, I am honoured to deliver this intervention on agenda item 2(b) on “Industrial Policies and Productive Capacity Policies for a Digital Economy”.

First, I wish to take note of the informative report TD/B/65(19/3) by the Secretariat on this very important subject. Indeed, the report highlights some of the key aspects of industrial policies, productive capacity policies and the digital economy that paint a clear picture of the state of play and further suggests some actions both at national and international levels.

Second, let me appreciate the distinguished panellists for their informative presentations and interactive exchange of ideas.

Mr. President,

The African Group recognises the importance of industrial policies and productive capacities as essential elements of the much-needed economic transformation of African economies. At the same time we take note of the fact that the world is going through a digital revolution which in our view, presents both opportunities and challenges.

The rapidly growing digitalization stresses the need for UNCTAD to upscale its Policy Review mandate in all relevant areas, including industrial, e-commerce and the digital economy, as well as science, technology and innovation fields so as to assist developing countries, in particular African countries address policy issues.

Mr. President,

Talking about the digital economy without addressing the existing digital divide should be on “leaving no one behind”. As pointed out by the panellists, key technologies such as advanced robotics, artificial intelligence, the internet of things, cloud computing, big data analytics as well as 3-D printing that are at the core of the evolving digital economy are more concentrated in the developed world. For instance, it is observed that only 4% of all three-dimensional printing is done in Africa and Latin America while the use of robots is also least used in most of the developing countries.

In order to address the digital divide in a meaningful way, it is imperative that focused and concerted efforts are made at all levels by all stakeholders. The much needed efforts will not only require appropriate policies but also financial resources, human and technical capacity, targeted investments and technical assistance.

Mr. President,

Considering that Africa is a continent with high number of unemployed population especially youth, the imagination of widespread use of robots, 3-D printing , among other ICTs ushers in fears that several aspects of digital economy will exacerbate the unemployment situation. Many have argued that ICTs are a source of new types of jobs. But the question is how will the unskilled and poor benefit from the ICTs?

Most important Mr. President, the African Group would like this discussion to focus on the question of how we can collectively, in an inclusive and sustainable manner promote digital economy with a bigger share of the population still not connected- not even to broadband network or high speed internet.

Mr. President,

On a more positive note, let me underscore the fact that in spite of the above highlighted challenges and fears, Africa has hope that the digital revolution will bear fruits. Digital economy indeed has the potential to transform our economies. This is because the Agenda 2063 of the African Union underlines digital economy as a key feature for Africa's development and further emphasises that ICTs will be key in connecting African countries as well as connecting Africa with rest of the world.

In a broader perspective, the African Group believes that addressing the digital economy within the preview of the SDG 9 - industry, infrastructure and innovation, and the SDG 17- on partnerships can build momentum that will ultimately lead to positive results for all.

Finally **Mr. President**, the Nairobi Maafikiano underscores the impact of ICTs and digital economy on global trade and development. It further requests UNCTAD to strengthen its work on enhancing the development gains from the digital economy and e-commerce. The African Group wishes to hail the good work being done by UNCTAD that include the convening of the e-commerce week and the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on e-commerce, the e-readiness assessments and other related works in the areas of research and policy analysis, consensus building and, technical assistance. In this context the Group also welcomes the suggestion by the UNCTAD SG to convene an Africa E-commerce Week and looks forward to receiving further information in this respect.

We call upon partners and other stakeholders to support these efforts to ensure that the ongoing digital revolution benefits all, especially the African countries that seem to be lacking behind in matters of industrialization, productive capacity and the digital economy.

I thank you Mr. President.