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**High-level roundtable on "Progress made in the implementation of and  
follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) outcomes  
at the regional and international levels"**

Statement submitted by

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## Check against delivery

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

High-level roundtable on "Review of progress made in the implementation of World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) outcomes"

Ana Cristina Neves on behalf of  
Honorable Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education of Portugal, Manuel Heitor

Your Excellencies,  
Honorable guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today representing the Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education of Portugal, who was invited to participate at this High-Level Roundtable and would have loved to be here but despite all efforts, could not do it. He sends his apologies, well wishes and asked me to convey his main messages to feed into this important discussion.

Despite significant progress in connectivity and access to the Internet over the last decade, ironically **digital divide is increasing** at different levels within and between countries, between rural and urban population, between old and young people, as well as between women and men. To that effect, joint efforts between different stakeholders need to be pursued to put **citizen's empowerment** at the cornerstone of the national and international strategies to reap the development opportunities provided by ICTs.

This must be done by strengthening **capacity building**, promoting **specialization** in digital technologies and applications for job qualification, ensuring the right conditions for the production of **new knowledge** and an active participation in **international R&D networks and programs**.

The best practice learnt in implementing ICT enabled emerging innovations in Portugal is the perception of the importance to invest on digital competences. They constitute the horizontal infrastructure which ensures consistency and coherence between ICTs

and innovation policies, together with other development policies. The development and capacity building are the main pillars and the key lever to ensure that emerging innovation translates into benefits for the citizens and the economy, and to address the current challenges identified in the UN Secretary General's Report.

As referred in that Report, the **impact** of technological evolution in areas such automation and artificial intelligence on the economy, trade, social norms and cultural engagement **is uncertain**. Digital competences will enable us to face such uncertainty in a robust way, by empowering citizens to deal with the transformative impacts of ICTs and preparing the ground for the future.

To that effect the Portuguese Government has launched on the April 3<sup>rd</sup> a broad National Initiative called "**Portugal INCoDe.2030**" to improve digital competences in the Portuguese population, following emerging strategies at worldwide level to place the country at the top of the digital competitiveness.

This short and medium term Initiative aims at addressing three major challenges:

- Promote **digital literacy for all**, to guarantee the full exercise of citizenship and inclusion in a society with increasingly dematerialized practices and in which many social interactions happen on the Internet and are increasingly mediated by electronic devices;
- Stimulate **employability** and skills training and **professional specialization** in digital technologies and applications in order to respond to growing market demand and to promote the qualification of employment in a higher value-added economy;
- Foster **new knowledge** through a strong participation in international R&D networks, and the production of new knowledge in the digital areas.

The strategy is developed through 5 main axes:

- **1. INCLUSION:** the aim is to ensure the generalization of equitable access to digital technologies to the entire population, to obtain information and communication
- **2. EDUCATION:** to ensure the education of the younger population by stimulating and strengthening digital literacy and digital competences in all lifelong learning and learning cycles

- **3. QUALIFICATION:** to professionally qualify the active population by providing it with the necessary knowledge to integrate into a labor market that depends heavily on digital skills
- **4. SPECIALIZATION:** to promote specialization in digital technologies and applications for job qualification and creation of added value in the economy
- **5. RESEARCH:** to ensure the conditions for the production of new knowledge and active participation in international R&D networks and programs.

This national Initiative has established an “Observatory on Digital Competences”, which will measure progress and impact through five (5) important goals: 1) Access; 2) Human Capital; 3) Use; 4) Investment; 5) Training and Certification.

A “Permanent Forum on Digital Competences” is also foreseen in consistency with what it is today widely accepted that the development of Information Society public policies require broad multistakeholder participation and discussion platforms. Eventually, both the Government and the Portuguese Parliament coordinate the Initiative at the political level.

On **financing models** which can support innovation in the implementation of innovation technologies, we believe that international collaboration and cooperation are key and public and private partnership models have to be set bearing in mind the Chinese proverb: “*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime*”, which gives great value to citizen’s empowerment.

