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Statement submitted by

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Opening remarks

For Isabelle Durant, Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD

Meeting:	Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) 2017-18 Inter-Sessional Panel 6-8 November 2017 Palais des Nations, Geneva
Date:	6 November
Time:	10h-10h20

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Esteemed Panellists,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Good morning everyone.

- I am pleased to open this inter-sessional panel of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (« *Commission de la science et de la technique au service du développement* »).

- UNCTAD believes – and I believe – that science and technology can play an important role as enablers and accelerators in economic development.

- The CSTD is the highest multilateral forum for debate on:
    - How Member States can unlock the development applications of new and emerging technologies; and
    - More generally, how they can leverage science, technology and innovation in pursuit of the SDGs.

- I also wish to emphasise the Commission's social role, because, in discussing science, technology and the SDGs, we are necessarily speaking to a *general audience*.

- We must therefore seek to communicate the advantages and disadvantages of new technologies openly and in plain language, to

engage our audience and loosen the natural "technophobia" that often precedes the adoption of valuable new technologies.

- In this regard, the Commission will deliberate on two objectives in this Inter-Sessional Panel:
    o Employing science, technology and innovation to increase the share of renewables in the energy mix, contributing to SDG 7 – ensuring access to clean and affordable energy; and
    o Building digital competencies to benefit from existing and emerging technologies, with a special focus on gender and youth dimensions.

- As you are aware, the world is progressing in adopting alternative forms of energy, including: solar, wind, hydro, biomass and geothermal.

- The rate of deployment of renewable energy technologies has accelerated, as costs for many of them have tumbled.

- There is a boom in the production of batteries, and the cost of energy storage has decreased substantially.

- This development is likely to disrupt the automobile industry: although less than 1% of cars sold each year are electric, most major carmakers are planning new electric models.

- Nevertheless, several bottlenecks remain in the renewable energy industry.

- Overall, the share of renewables in the energy mix remains low – the IEA estimated they account for 14% of primary energy demand world-wide in 2014.

- Inhibitors to a wider adoption of renewables range from:
    o Economic and financial factors;
    o Technical limitations;
    o Infrastructure bottlenecks in power generation and transmission;
    o Environmental sustainability; and
    o Skills and competencies.

- As an example of technical limitations, renewable energy technologies are often small-scale, with their sources located in isolated areas. This limits their applicability as the primary source of electricity in populous cities.

- As an example of environmental challenges, first generation biofuels continue to raise concerns about life cycle emissions and land use priorities.

- To maintain our progress on spreading the adoption of renewable energy, therefore, we face a cross-section of challenges.

- As well as specific policy and technical responses, we need to avoid treating these challenges in isolation – we need the integrated approach.

- Such an integrated approach is implicit in the SDGs.

- And may I add – it is explicit in UNCTAD's mandate as the UN System's focal point "for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment, and sustainable development".

- In all of these efforts – related to renewable energy and other issues – we require technically competent people, versed in the cross-cutting impediments to employing science, technology and innovation in service of development.

- For example, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation and robotics are disrupting global labour markets.

- UNCTAD's analysis, presented in its 2017 Trade and Development Report, confirms that these technologies are steadily replacing repetitive and routine tasks in many industries, retrenching low-skill workers in the process.

- Estimates show 85%-90% of future jobs will require ICT skills by 2020.

- Yong people are at an advantage when adapting to the digital transformation.

- The multi-media interface on computers and mobile phones allows young people with a lack of traditional literacy skills to understand content on digital devices and exploit various functions via new technologies.

- There is empirical evidence suggesting that the increasing adoption of mobile phones in developing countries leads to the rise of employment, especially among women.

- The OECD recently reported that non-traditional work – for example, part-time and self-employment in the platform economy – enables flexible working schedules and creates new working opportunities for women.

- For example, estimates show that women represent 73.9% e-business owners on Chinese e-shopping website, Taobao.

- Overall, digital skills and competencies play key roles in maximising the benefit of technologies in individual, organisational, and national development.

- International agencies agree that the most fundamental skillsets for individuals and companies in the digital era are the capabilities to adopt new technologies.

- For individuals, this involves basic education and literacy as well as familiarity with technology devices.

- For companies, this involves embedding ICTs in their business systems.

- Therefore, enhancing digital skills and competencies will be crucial in pursuit of SDG 4 – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- I would like to leave you with an inspiring analogy for the Commission's work.

- The economist Arthur Cecil Pigou wrote that the goal of research is both fruit and light: light being a better understanding of the world and fruit being the ability to change the world in a meaningful way.

- I firmly believe this is what the CSTD is doing here – shining light on emerging topics in science, technology and innovation, so that we can use the fruit to build a more sustainable world.

- I wish you productive deliberations.