

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD), twenty-third session (virtual meeting)
Geneva, 10-12 June 2020**

**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 level**

Introduction of the Report of the Secretary-General

Ms. Shamika N. Sirimanne
Director of the Division on Technology and Logistics
and Head of the CSTD Secretariat
UNCTAD

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

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

Statement by
Ms. Shamika N. Sirimanne
Director, Division on Technology and Logistics
UNCTAD

12 June 2020, Geneva

*Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

I am honoured to introduce the Report of the Secretary-General under this Agenda item (A/75/62–E/2020/11). The report has been prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat based on information provided by 31 UN entities and other international organizations and stakeholders concerning their efforts to implement WSIS outcomes in 2019.

This year's session happens at a significant juncture – 2020 marks the 15-year anniversary of WSIS. The pace of technological development and digitalization has been so fast that technologies that were in their infancy when WSIS met in Tunis have become mainstream, and some have become obsolete and replaced by later innovations. The scope and scale of the impact of digital technologies on economy, society, culture and governance just keep accelerating.

The current outbreak of COVID-19 has brought home the importance of these developments. As the lockdowns were administered all over the world, we depended on digital technologies to hold this session of the CSTD, to work, to have an education, buy food, consult the doctor and reach out to our friends and

family. For almost half the world's population without access to Internet, there has been very little economic and social activities during this lockdown. They were in a shutdown!

At CSTD you have been raising the concern that the digital divide would become a development divide **one day**. And this pandemic shows us how fast this day of reckoning has come.

While the SG's report addresses the multifaceted divides that still affect the information society, it also discusses key developments in the digital economy. There we see that the most dynamic growth is in data management, where corporations predominantly based in the United States of America and China and with roots in social media, search engines, e-commerce and cloud-based services dominate world markets. UNCTAD's Digital Economy Report 2019 presents a deeper analysis of these issues.

The report also highlights issues of rights, duties and ethics for digital technologies. Information about individuals is now gathered in the digital space and held by private corporations. Public concern has grown about the intrusiveness and potential impact of such data gathering, the risk of surveillance and the increasing use of algorithms to automate decisions that affect our lives. This concern has led to regulatory interventions such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation and to a proliferation of proposed normative frameworks for the deployment and use of digital technologies.

Let me touch upon digital cooperation. Last June, the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation issued its final Report, *The Age of Digital*

Interdependence. The Panel formulated five set of recommendations to: build an inclusive digital economy and society; develop human and institutional capacity; protect human rights and human agency; promote digital trust, security and stability; and foster global digital cooperation. Yesterday, the Secretary-General presented his *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*, which proposes his vision for how the international community should engage on digital issues focusing on key areas for action. Under Secretary-General Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild, will share with us more information about this roadmap.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, the progress in access to ICTs has been very fast, but it has failed to ensure that the benefits of digital innovations are available to all.

Digital technologies are setting the stage for an increasingly complex and diverse information society. We need a global, inclusive and holistic discourse about the multi-dimensional impacts of these technologies on the noble vision of WSIS of a “people-centred information society”. As never before, there is an urgent need for all actors in the digital space to cooperate and act together.

Thank you.