

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

Opening Ceremony

Address by

Mr. Houlin Zhao
Secretary-General
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

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.

Commission on Science and Technology for Development, Twenty Third Session

Opening Remarks

ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao

10 June 2020

Good afternoon. I would like to thank UNCTAD Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi for the invitation to speak to you today. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate him on taking over from me as the Chair of the United Nation Group on the Information Society this year, where we have been working together across the UN System to achieve maximum sustainable impact.

We meet at an important time in the life of our organizations. Over the course of the week, ITU is holding its first-ever Virtual Consultation of Councilors of the ITU Council. It will address urgent issues facing the ITU Council 2020, and ensure ITU's business continuity in the times of COVID-19. I am very pleased to join you online today to address the 23rd Session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.

The world has entered a new phase of the digital transformation amid a global pandemic, making the need for information and communication technologies at the national and global level has now become more necessary than ever. Addressing the challenges to bring ICTs to everyone during and after this crisis are high on ITU's agenda. Our response to the pandemic has been swift, and it is based on cooperation.

Reliable and trustworthy digital networks and services is of fundamental importance. One of ITU's first measures was the launch of the Global Network Resiliency Platform (REG4COVID), a multi-stakeholder effort to ensure that networks are kept resilient and telecoms services are available to all at a time when demand is spiking. We also quickly launched new guidelines to assist countries develop national emergency telecommunication plans to ensure there is effective and timely sharing of information across all levels of government.

ITU has worked with WHO, UNICEF, and telecommunication companies to text people directly on their mobile phones with vital health messaging to help protect them from COVID-19. We have joined the Global Education Coalition led by UNESCO and also issued Guidelines for Parents, Carers, Guardians, and Educators for Child Online Protection to help minimize online risks. We are working with ILO on digital skills for youth, starting with young people in Africa.

ITU is drawing upon expertise from the community of the AI for Good Global Summit to examine how emerging technologies like artificial intelligence can be used to combat COVID-19.

ITU was instrumental in the adoption of the Broadband Commission Agenda for Action, which outlines immediate measures that stakeholders can take to shore-up digital networks, strengthen capacity at critical connectivity points like hospitals and transport hubs, and boost digital access and inclusion.

In all our actions, ITU is committed to bringing the benefits of ICT to everyone, and using innovative ways to connect the world, both through terrestrial and space-based communication technologies.

This year's World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD), held fully virtually under the theme "Connect 2030: ICTs for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" we reaffirmed ITU's commitment of enhancing collaboration and cooperation to strengthen the role of ICTs as we embark on the UN Secretary General's 'Decade of Action' to deliver the SDGs.

Our roadmap, the Connect 2030 Agenda lays out a path to accelerate progress on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and digital inclusion. With 10 years left to achieve these goals, I call on everyone to help channel this agenda and strengthen linkages and alignment of the WSIS Action Lines with the SDGs. We must also recognize the importance of the WSIS Action Lines as a key framework for progress on the achievement of SDGs. To strengthen the alignment of the WSIS Process with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, I have submitted contributions of ITU and the WSIS implementation activities to the UN High-Level Political Forum 2020.

This year is pivotal to leveraging the power of technology to connect people and bring them closer together. The WSIS Forum enhances multi-stakeholder cooperation, providing meaningful connections to the information society and ensuring that ICTs remain high on the political agenda. The WSIS Forum 2020 will be held virtually from the 22nd of June culminating with a final week from 7 to 10 September. The much awaited WSIS Prizes 2020 will also be awarded and announced virtually this year.

Marking 15 years of the implementation of WSIS Process, the Forum will serve as a platform to track the achievements of WSIS Action Lines in collaboration with the UN Agencies involved and provide information and analyses of the implementation of WSIS Action Lines since 2005.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The COVID-19 crisis calls for solidarity. We will bring the benefits of information and communication technologies to everyone, everywhere only by working together and reaffirming the values of multilateralism and international cooperation.

I wish you a successful meeting and hope to see all of you online for the virtual WSIS Forum 2020.

Thank you.