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

Statement submitted by

Mr. Thomas Schneider
Ambassador, Head of International Relations Service
Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM)
Federal Department of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC)
Swiss Confederation

United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)
23ʳᵈ Annual Session, 10-12 June 2020

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

Statement of Thomas Schneider, Ambassador, Head of International Relations Service, Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM), Federal Department of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC), Swiss Confederation

- Since WSIS in 2003 and 2005, digitalisation has profoundly changed our lives and affected our economies and societies alike.

- And we have probably experienced this more intensely than ever over the last few months: the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated to us both how reliant we are on technology, but also how much potential there continues to be in digital solutions.

- We are facing new opportunities and can benefit from what technology has to offer: Be it in the context of the pandemic or in other key priorities like the fight against climate change or our efforts to achieve the SDGs.

- At the same time, digital transformation is also giving rise to new challenges:

  o The pandemic has reminded us that access to the internet and digital technology is still not universal – especially women and girls are too often excluded. People without access are cut off from vital information, services and participation that many of us can take for granted.

  o We are also experiencing challenges in the use of digital technologies. Discussions about contact tracing applications have given new urgency to longstanding questions about privacy, data protection, surveillance and data abuse.

  o We have also observed once again how the online dissemination of misinformation, conspiracy tales and hate speech undermine open, free and constructive discourse and threaten some of our most fundamental democratic values.

- Our response to these challenges will shape how the digital space of the future will look like – and whether it will resemble our vision of an open, free and secure internet.

- Switzerland is convinced that the respect of principles of democratic processes, international law and human rights - including the right to privacy - are the foundation to achieve this objective.

- However, in addition to this foundation, we need effective, interdisciplinary and global cooperation with all relevant actors. Too often, fundamental issues and governance approaches continue to be addressed in institutional silos.

- As highlighted by the recommendations of the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation we need an approach to digital governance that is agile, more inclusive and better coordinated. These recommendations as well as the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation presented yesterday and here today are a major milestone in this endeavour as expressed by the Swiss President, Ms. Simonetta Sommaruga during the launch of the Roadmap.

- Switzerland has been supporting the development of digital cooperation and governance mechanisms for 20 years. We fundamentally believe that cooperation and an inclusive multi-stakeholder approach – where all stakeholders work together in their respective roles and responsibilities – are a prerequisite for the creation of a human-centred, free and secure digital world that benefits everyone.

- We have strong foundations to build upon. 15 Years ago, we have created the UN IGF as a platform for Multistakeholder-dialogue on internet governance. This open and inclusive dialogue is still necessary, but no longer enough. What is now needed is strengthening a "network of networks" that allows institutions and actors to cooperate across disciplines and can produce fair, pragmatic and sustainable governance solutions. A network where institutions like the CSTD, together and in close cooperation with a strengthened and fully-fledged "IGF+" architecture solidly based on its WSIS mandate, will have a key role to play.

- Switzerland will continue to work towards this goal and thus contribute to an open, free and secure digital space.

Thank you for your attention