UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD), twenty-fourth session
Geneva, 17-21 May 2021

Harnessing blockchain for sustainable development: prospects and challenges

Statement submitted by

Ms. Allison Schwier
Acting Science and Technology Adviser
to the U.S. Secretary of State

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on blockchain technology, particularly its framing of "prospects and challenges."

o The United States strongly supports responsible innovation that promotes global economic growth. A truly successful digital age depends on vibrant competition and innovation and produces sustainable and inclusive development.

o Digital technologies and the resulting increased access to information have fueled economic growth, created new ways to express views and access information, enabled social progress, and given people better tools to participate in public debate and determine their own futures. We want to ensure that continues.

o Blockchain technologies in particular may give us new tools to address long-standing challenges. However, identifying those challenges is the appropriate starting point; otherwise the technology is a solution in search of a problem.

o A collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach is crucial to this effort. We encourage close collaboration with global standard-setting bodies, the private sector, civil society, scientists and academics, and other international experts.

o The United States' ongoing development assistance includes a concerted effort to advance open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems. We believe these three attributes -- open, inclusive, and secure -- are critical if we are to succeed in shaping digital ecosystems that truly expand economic opportunity, enable

transparency, and improve a sense of agency in how the digital age affects local communities.

o We appreciate the Secretary-General's report for acknowledging certain uncertainties, unknowns, and risks associated with blockchain industries. Consider, for example, issues as varied as the regulatory treatment of data on blockchain networks, stable governance arrangements, consumer protection concerns, and illicit finance flows.

o Constructive attention to these issues is an important means to ensure that as interest in blockchain technologiesgrows, its development as a field ultimately addresses the very real challenges that communities face daily.

o Finally, we note that the report mentions privacy as a concern - we believe privacy and human rights should be promoted in the design and deployment of blockchain technologies.