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Opening Session

Address by

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**Twenty-fourth annual session of the United Nations Commission
on Science and Technology for Development**

ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao

17 May 2021

OPENING REMARKS

Hello, everybody, and thank you to UNCTAD Acting Secretary-General Isabelle Durant for the invitation to speak with you today. It is an honour to address the twenty-fourth Session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, and to do it on World Telecommunication and Information Society Day.

The Day's theme this year is "Accelerating digital transformation in challenging times." It highlights the critical role that information and communication technologies have played in saving lives and sustaining economies and societies in the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. All this has been made possible in large part thanks to the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society organized more than 15 years ago by ITU on behalf of the UN family. Imagine how much worse off we would be if not for this important work and the remarkable progress that followed it!

The last two decades have seen great progress in ICT development, but our work has only begun. Half of humanity is still unconnected, deprived of the digital technologies and services that have proven so essential since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. That is why the theme of WTISD this year also underscores the urgency of acting now to bring the benefits of ICTs to all. This is in line with the clear message sent last June by the UN Secretary-General that we need to connect everybody with affordable services by 2030.

This huge challenge calls for strengthened cooperation. This is an opportunity for me to thank UNCTAD for its chairmanship this past year of the United Nations Group on the Information Society, a group of more than 30 UN Agencies dedicated to the WSIS objectives. Now more than ever, the WSIS Action Lines serve as a reminder of the importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation – the very kind of cooperation that has been on display throughout this year's WSIS Forum, and that has resulted in on-the-ground partnerships and enabling collaboration the world over.

Today marks the start of the Forum's final week. Since January, the WSIS Forum 2021 has brought together more than 11,000 participants from over 180 countries across the world, driven by the goal of facilitating the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for advancing sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the pandemic has undermined – and in some areas reversed – progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, I call on all of you to strengthen linkages and alignment of the WSIS Action Lines with the SDGs.

ITU has been working towards aligning the WSIS Process with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development by contributing to the UN High-Level Political Forum and the STI Forum. To that end, I am pleased to let you know that I have submitted contributions of ITU and the WSIS implementation activities to HLPF 2021.

I am confident that, together, we can ensure that ICTs and the WSIS Action Lines help put the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development back on track. Today, on World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, let us work together to advance ITU's Connect 2030 Agenda, the WSIS Action Lines and the Sustainable Development Goals. Let us reaffirm our commitment to harnessing the opportunities offered by ICTs while addressing their challenges and bridging the digital divide.

I wish you a successful session and hope to see you all online during the final week of the WSIS Forum 2021.

Thank you.