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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 by the CSTD Secretariat

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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
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- I am honoured to introduce the Report of the Secretary-General under this Agenda item (A/76/64−E/2021/11). The report has been prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat based on information provided by 29 UN entities and other international organizations and stakeholders concerning their efforts to implement WSIS outcomes in 2020.

- My presentation will summarize four key aspects of the implementation of the outcome of WSIS in a year that was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. These aspects are:
    o The impact of COVID-19
    o Connectivity and affordability
    o Digital cooperation, and
    o New challenges in digital governance

COVID-19 pandemic

- COVID-19 has made 2020 the most challenging year for progress towards the WSIS vision since the CSTD began its examination of this issue. It has also made the role of ICTs in sustainable development more prominent than ever before.

- Digital technologies were indispensable to address the pandemic and to enable resilience. Remote schooling, telemedicine, remote work, using videoconference platforms became the norm. The trend towards e-commerce has accelerated, raising e-commerce's share of global retail trade from 14 per cent in 2019 to about 17 per cent in 2020. Also, the use of big data and artificial intelligence had contributed to better public health interventions and faster vaccine development.

- These developments seem likely to continue after the pandemic, accelerating the digital transformation.

- Yet, the pandemic has also demonstrated the enduring challenges in the digital realm. Half the world has no access to the Internet. Two thirds of the world's school-age children – or 1.3 billion children aged 3 to 17 years old – do not have internet connection in their homes, and could not continue with their educatin.

- Even when there is access to Internet, data remains expensive in over half the world's economies, compared with the target of the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development.

- Other challenges have also emerged during this pandemic. There has been widespread misinformation and disinformation, amounting to what WHO has called an infodemic. The role of health-related and other data in disease control has raised new issues related to privacy and data protection. The

growing use of ICTs across all sectors has raised new threats to cybersecurity.

- Speaking of data, I am also pleased to inform you that UNCTAD later this year will publish the 2021 edition of the Digital Economy Report, which this time will focus on Cross-border Data Flows and Development. This is a critical issue in view of the rising economic and strategic importance of data and data flows in our economies and societies.

Digital cooperation

- Let me touch upon digital cooperation as set out in the Report of the Secretary-General: Road Map for Digital Cooperation. The Road Map responds to complex changes and rapid developments in digital technology and their impacts on economies and societies. The Road Map highlights the convening role of the United Nations and outlines priorities for global connectivity, digital public goods, inclusion, capacity-building, human rights, trust and security and emerging new technologies.

- In this regard, the President of the General Assembly convened a High-level Thematic Debate on Digital Cooperation and Connectivity on 27 April 2021 under the theme "Whole-of-Society Approaches to End the Digital Divide", which highlighted the importance and urgency of political commitment at the highest levels to address the digital divide in support of COVID-19 adaptation, response and recovery efforts, in alignment with the SDGs.

New challenges in digital governance

- Let me also briefly highlight new governance challenges that are continually emerging as technology advances and society increases dependence on digital resources. Each step towards the information society has created new opportunities for criminals. Cybersecurity has become paramount.

- The rapidly evolving roles of platforms, global data management and business models built around economies of scale in leveraging data have become a significant feature of our lives. Governments in many countries are exploring frameworks for the regulation and accountability of platforms, including their relationships with local businesses, issues of competition policy and the extent to which global businesses should contribute, through taxation, to national development priorities.

- Growing volumes of digital devices, applications, data traffic and digitalization have increased energy consumption, which contributes to climate change. For example, ICT ecosystem as a whole, including personal digital devices, mobile-phone networks and televisions, accounts for more than 2 per cent of global carbon emissions, which is comparable with the aviation industry's emissions. In addition, large volumes of electronic waste are generated through accelerating technological obsolescence.

- Governments, private sector, civil society organizatins, international organizatins, such as this Commission, need to work together to address these new governance challenges.

Closing

- Let me now conclude. The years since WSIS, particularly in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic, have demonstrated key lessons: the power of digital technologies to reshape our economies and societies; the challenges faced as societies seek to shape technology for good; the interplay of opportunity and risk; the importance of addressing and mitigating digital divides; and the growing recognition that a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society depends on building the relationship between human and technological development.

- Thank you.