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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**

Statement submitted by

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UK MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

UN COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM 2021

Session on 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

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to speak at this invaluable session today. And thank you to the panelists for your fascinating insights and constructive ideas. I am delighted to see so many people, from a range of backgrounds and regions, coming together to share experiences on implementing the WSIS outcomes.

The United Kingdom sees the WSIS process as key to creating an Internet that works for everyone. Our vision is to promote an accessible and interoperable, global Internet for future generations; to protect the right for everyone to share information, and to communicate freely and safely online. We welcome the valuable role the Commission plays in advancing progress, towards the important objectives outlined in the WSIS outcomes.

In our view, these outcomes play an essential role in harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies (or ICTs), for achieving the sustainable development goals. These technologies have the power to accelerate our efforts to address the world's greatest challenges, whether that is improving global health or tackling climate change.

Today's discussion has come at a crucial time, when the Covid-19 pandemic has shown how valuable ICTs are. During unprecedented social distancing restrictions, these technologies have enabled us to continue to work, trade, shop, communicate and learn. Their benefits have ranged from keeping people connected to friends and family, to accelerating public health responses.

Here in the UK, we have used ICTs to mitigate social exclusion: the government has invested in the Digital Lifeline fund, which has provided tablets, data and digital support to approximately 5000 people with learning disabilities. And across the world, ICTs have been a tool for people to access information, support, and vital public services, from online medical consultations to job support programmes.

But despite extraordinary progress, the pandemic has shown that we still have a lot more to do, to ensure that everyone can benefit from the advantages that these technologies bring. Half of the world's population still remains unconnected. Covid has exposed the impact of unequal Internet access across the globe and the realities of digital exclusion. It is becoming increasingly urgent that we accelerate the provision of affordable internet access and build digital skills in order to close the digital divide and ensure no one is left behind.

To this end, the United Kingdom is proud to invest in programmes that foster digital inclusion and support emerging tech sectors in the most marginalised communities. Our Digital Access Programme uses scalable and sustainable models for inclusive connectivity and locally-relevant digital content. Working hand in hand with governments, regulators and industry, we are promoting digital literacy, cybersecurity and digital innovation for social impact in partner countries. Through our Tech Hub Network, we are forging partnerships that boost local digital economies and strengthen digital skills in developing and middle income countries. Almost half of the Network's Future Female Business School programmes will focus on green tech and agritech, which will provide tools for unconnected groups to develop clean energy business solutions.

The United Kingdom is committed to continuing work at a national, regional and global level to support the multistakeholder model for Internet governance and advance progress towards implementing the WSIS outcomes. We believe that all stakeholders have a role to play in achieving this vision. Governments alone will not bridge the digital divide and so we welcome the important proposals in the UN Secretary General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation.

Chair, thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to the upcoming discussions.