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Panel on implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international level

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Good morning and good afternoon from New York to the delegates and distinguished guests. We join this session with special thanks and appreciation for including the private sector in the program today.

Indeed, since Microsoft launched a UN Affairs team in New York and Geneva over two years ago, we have been grateful to so many actors across the UN System, the office of the tech envoy and the Secretary-General himself for his leadership in bringing diverse voices to UN processes—both formally and informally.

Like so many of our counterparts in the private sector, we are committed to advancing all 17 of the SDGs, but we know that making progress in this decade of action means working together, bringing others along, and creating space and opportunity for multi-actor collaboration.

Our global challenges – such as climate change, global health, and inequality – can only be solved with concerted and coordinated multistakeholder action. The world needs to get back on track to achieve the SDGs and everyone has a very important role to play.

We believe that digital technologies can and should contribute to a better world, which is why our mission statement is to empower everyone and every organization on the planet to achieve more.

I have been working at Microsoft for almost 12 years, and I can assure you we are often asked to talk about a portfolio of fascinating topics, ranging from data governance, AI, algorithmic transparency, and bias. We work with some of the leading cryptologists in the world. We have the great privilege to think about the application and societal impact on thought-provoking topics, such as quantum computing and block chain. The work of hundreds of engineers improving our understanding of the threat landscape from cyberattacks is also of great importance.

But I'd like to focus my remarks on the most basic problem that we need to solve with great urgency: closing the digital divide.

Before we can begin to discuss the role of digital technology, we must acknowledge that most technologies are fully accessed and utilized only with a connection to the Internet.

Internet access is not available for almost three billion people around the world. Most people unable to access the Internet live in developing countries.

We often hear connectivity referred to as SDG Zero, or the thread that runs through all the SDGs. We believe that connectivity is the enabler, an accelerator to all that we need to accomplish in this Decade of Action.

Throughout the pandemic and with increased frequency we hear of the need to put humanity at the center of technology and ensure affordable, safe, and secure internet services for all. To close the digital gap there needs to be a shift to put people at the center of this conversation. There needs to be a people-centered approach to connectivity.

What does this mean?

First, connectivity goals should be measured by the number of people meaningfully online, not theoretical coverage. According to GSMA data, the coverage gap around the world continues to narrow—but the usage gap remains wide.

Microsoft is working with many partners around the world to contribute to bringing access to the middle mile and last mile of the broadband value chain—where the Internet truly reaches people in a meaningful way—by partnering to improve affordability, awareness, digital skilling, and literacy.

Microsoft is advocating this issue through three themes: Access, Adoption, and Applications

The first pillar is **access**. This means ensuring the availability of affordable connectivity and devices. With proper access, the next theme is **adoption**. Access alone is not enough. Microsoft is working on building digital literacy and skills so people can reap the benefits of connectivity. Lastly, Microsoft advocates for the development of digital **applications** that position people to benefit from basic human services, such education, health care and economic development available through new channels.

Second, I would also like to say a few words about Connectivity for Trade and Development. This matters for businesses in the affected countries. It hinders their potential to make the most of global markets and become vehicles of trade and development for their economies. Connectivity also matters for making trade work for MSMEs. It empowers them with digital training and skills development, access to payment systems and trade logistics, digital legal frameworks, and access to digital finance. Connectivity promises to transform many MSMEs in developing countries into engines for growth.

Finally, I would like to comment on an essential ingredient necessary to achieve this people-centered meaningful access: How will this be financed?

The Secretary-General's [report](#) acknowledges the necessity of financing mechanisms, citing the Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2021 of the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development.

We were very encouraged to see a reference to blended finance models in the Task Force's assessment. The report noted that middle-income countries attract most blended finance deals. We hope to see more actors embracing blended finance arrangements, also for those countries who are the most vulnerable and have the greatest need: the LDCs.

We are encouraged by the Task Force report's chapter on Science, Technology, Innovation, and Capacity Building, where "last mile" connectivity and "the cost of internet access" are identified as policy priorities for both government and public-private cooperation to create inclusive digital economies.

Our commitment is to work with our community and stakeholders on that journey.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this dialogue.