

Introduction of the Report of the Secretary-General on Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels

Statement by
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Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to introduce this Report of the Secretary-General on the 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 levels.

The report has been prepared by the secretariat based on information provided by 38 entities in the United Nations system, international organizations, and other stakeholders concerning their efforts in the implementation of WSIS outcomes in 2023.

In this introduction, I will focus on two key aspects of the implementation of the WSIS outcomes in a year marked by geopolitical instability and conflicts, compounded by the increasingly visible effects of global warming. These are:

- digital governance in the ear of rapid AI development
- sustainable digital development.

Digital governance in the era of rapid AI development

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2023, the most significant development was the emergence of generative artificial intelligence, particularly large language models, into the public sphere. This represents a significant advancement in the development of AI, potentially marking a pivotal moment in human development. This advancement has the potential to change for the better many aspects of society. However, it also raises concerns about misuse, impact on employment, discrimination, surveillance, and governance.

Questions of data ownership and control are central in national and international digital policy. Increasingly, the largest data sets and, thereby capacity for data analysis, are held by global corporations, including big platforms. Platform regulation is essential as platforms serve as gateways for services, and concerns exist over algorithmic content prioritization and their impact on the spread of misinformation.

The view that we need rules and safeguards concerning data, data platforms, and the expanding capabilities of AI is more and more widely shared. However different perspectives exist about the specific approaches to be followed in their development, such as for example self-regulation or hard law. The CSTD could provide a space for a dialogue on data and AI that helps improve consistency among international approaches, norms and policies to promote responsible data governance practices and to address data privacy and security concerns.

Another dimension of digital governance concerns inclusiveness. The expansion of digitalization and the pervasive nature of ICT across all spheres of human society, both nationally and internationally, underscores the imperative of dialogue and collaboration among diverse stakeholders. Advancing progress towards universal, affordable and meaningful connectivity remains a priority in ensuring that no one is left behind in the information society. While growth in access to ICT and its use by

Governments, organizations and individuals continues, severe digital divides within and between countries correspond to gaps in economic development, wealth or gender. The proportion of individual users ranges from 91 per cent in Europe to 37 per cent in Africa. There is a persistent gender-based digital divide in many countries, particularly lower income countries.

The Summit of Future to be held in September, an outcome of which will be a Global Digital Compact, and the WSIS+20 review offer opportunities for strengthening collective action and collaboration. Only in cooperation and collaboration can we address shared challenges and seize shared opportunities in digital development.

Sustainable Digital Development

Now let me turn to the second key aspect, as the capabilities of digital technologies have increased, there has been increasing interest in the relationship between ICTs and sustainable development. New technologies and the data analysis they enable are powerful resources in facilitating the understanding of environmental challenges and enabling interventions to reduce, mitigate or adapt to environmental risks and harms. However, such technologies also have environmentally detrimental impacts through the extraction and depletion of natural resources; energy consumption that contributes to climate change; and pollution, including electronic waste. There is increased interest in ways to develop a circular digital economy, with greater use of renewable energy, more environmentally efficient infrastructure and devices, the repair and reuse of devices displacing early obsolescence and more intensive recycling of digital equipment and components. Monitoring and measurement are critical for success.

Closing

Distinguished delegates,

Nearly 20 years have passed since the WSIS established a framework for international action to take advantage of what were then relatively new digital

technologies. In these years we have witnessed significant advances in the use of digital networks and services, and in their impact on almost every aspect of social, economic and cultural development. As the Secretary-General report suggests, it is essential to recognize the pivotal role that WSIS plays in guiding international efforts towards inclusive and sustainable digital development.

The WSIS+20 review needs to consider how far the world has reached since WSIS, reflecting on what has been achieved and what remains to be accomplished, and to question how to achieve aspirations for the future and to avoid or mitigate those problems that can be anticipated.

To conclude my statement, I wish to convey our gratitude to all the stakeholders who work tirelessly on the implementation of WSIS outcomes at the national, regional and international levels. As the focal point of the United Nations for science and technology for development, the CSTD has a responsibility to provide them with an inclusive space for the consideration of today's and tomorrow's digital challenges and opportunities and to build consensus on our common goals.

Thank you for your attention.
