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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2023 to
implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

Submission by

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General 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 levels" (to the 27th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

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Report on the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

(January – December 2023)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) through the Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) serves as facilitator for the implementation of and follow-up to the action lines:

- C1 - The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development
- C7 - ICT Applications: E-government
- C11 - International and regional cooperation

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I - Summary

As the leading facilitator for Action Lines C1, C7eGov, and C11, as a member of the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS), and the institutional manager of the IGF Secretariat¹, UNDESA continued its efforts to promote policy dialogue and advocacy among United Nations bodies, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, and partners for the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). In 2023, UN DESA organized a meeting during the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Forum to discuss the future of e-government in the era of AI and conducted an assessment of national and city portals with an updated methodology for the upcoming United Nations E-Government Survey 2024. This survey, published every two years, provides a comparative rating of national and most populous city government portals. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in 2023 highlighted the potential of AI but also addressed concerns about digital divides, data governance, cybersecurity, and environmental sustainability. It emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to digitalization's impact, which will be further discussed in the Global Digital Compact and the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

The 8th Annual Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI Forum) in 2023 explored the role of STI in accelerating recovery from COVID-19 and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) focused on effective recovery measures from the

¹ <http://www.intgovforum.org/>

pandemic and reviewed specific SDGs related to water, energy, industry, cities, and partnerships. The Political Declaration adopted at the HLPF highlighted the importance of inclusive education, bridging digital divides, and leveraging science, technology, and innovation for sustainable development. Additionally, UN DESA played a crucial role in the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, working to improve the availability and quality of ICT data and indicators, particularly in developing countries.

II. Analytical overview of trends and experiences

UN DESA organized a facilitation meeting on WSIS Action Lines C1 (promotion of ICTs for development), C7 (e-Government) and C11 (international and regional collaboration), Session 192— Future of e-government assessment in the era of AI: Opportunities and Challenges, on 16 March 2023 during the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2023. The session was opened by a short introduction on the United Nations E-Government Survey and its methodology by DGB followed by inputs from the participants. The questions to participants included about future of e-government services, how can UN DESA improve the methodology particularly by utilizing conversational AI and/or new automated technologies to assess e-government portals. Issues raised by member states included how to capture e-government services that are jointly developed by public and private sector, how we measure inefficiencies in government i.e. they invest so much on digitalization but these services are not used, how to measure Artificial Intelligence based services, how we can measure incorrect data governments may have, how to measure privacy efforts, how to include immersive technologies. Some participants also raised that mobile broadband is more relevant for them than the traditional board. It is also added that the more important thing than the ranking is what to do to improve the e-government development in that country.

Global e-government development

UN DESA conducted assessment of national and city portals in 2023 with an updated methodology for the upcoming United Nations E-Government Survey 2024.

The Survey is published by, UN DESA, once every two years. The 2024 Survey will mark the 13th edition, following a consistent methodology first adopted in 2003. The Survey assesses global and regional e-government development through a comparative rating of national government portals relative to one another. It is not designed to capture e-government development in an absolute sense, but rather to provide a snapshot of country trends and relative rankings of e-government development in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It presents the trends and relative rankings of e-government development across 193 Member States through a quantitative composite index, the E-Government Development Index (EGDI), with three separate components - the Online Service Index (OSI), Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII), and Human Capital Index (HCI). It also presents the trends and relative rankings of a) citizen-engagement - through the E-Participation Index (EPI), and b) 193 municipalities - through the Local Government Index (LOSI).

Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

The 18th annual IGF meeting was hosted by the Government of Japan in Kyoto from 8 to 12 October 2023. The Forum's overarching theme is: The Internet We Want - Empowering All People. Key issues discussed during the week of rich exchanges, included the acceleration

in artificial intelligence (AI) beyond generative AI. While AI offers opportunities to address the off-track SDGs, it also poses new risks, threatening to increase disinformation and exacerbate inequalities. Urgent action is needed to mitigate these risks, while maximizing its promise. The fact that a third of the world's population is not yet online, and is losing out as a result, shows how digital divides can increase inequalities between developed and developing countries, men and women, young and elderly, rich and poor, urban and rural areas.

Other important themes covered during the week included data governance – how to ensure that the immense volume of data generated by digital technology can be used for the common good, while respecting individual privacy; cybersecurity – how to protect countries, communities and individuals from malicious use of the Internet and digital technology; and the environment – how to maximize the contribution that technology makes to environmental sustainability and the fight against climate change, while minimizing its own environmental footprint, for example, in e-consumption and e-waste.

This year's IGF took place within the framework of wider discussions about the future role of information and communication technologies within the UN system including two UN processes to which the IGF brings its unique multistakeholder perspective. First, the Global Digital Compact – a comprehensive new approach to digitalization's impact on the world community which will form part of the UN's Summit of the Future in 2024; and second, the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) that led to the establishment of the IGF. The renewal of the IGF's mandate will be discussed by the UN General Assembly as part of the WSIS+20 review in 2025.

As a key outcome, the Kyoto IGF Messages are sourced directly from Forum sessions and provide a high-level overview for decision-makers of the most current thinking on key Internet governance and digital policy issues.

'The Internet We Want' vision paper was released at the IGF by the UN Secretary-General appointed IGF Leadership Panel Chair, Vint Cerf and Vice-Chair Maria Ressa. The paper reiterated that digital governance is critical for economic, social and environmental development, and is a crucial enabler of sustainable development. It further elaborated what it means for the Internet to be whole and open, universal and inclusive, free-flowing and trustworthy, safe and secure and rights-respecting.

The UN Global Digital Compact which aims to set out principles, objectives and actions to secure a human-centred digital future received robust discussion and review. The outcomes of the IGF, including from its High-level, Parliamentary and Youth tracks, will also serve as a concrete framework for the Compact that will be agreed on at the UN Summit of the Future next year.

Held from 8 to 12 October, this year's IGF brought together close to 9,000 registered participants, from 178 countries (92% of UN Member States), with 5,500 joining on-site with others participating online in a fully hybrid interactive mode, making it the largest and most geographically diverse Forum to date. Representatives from governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community and international organizations, gathered under the umbrella theme of 'The Internet We Want - Empowering All People'. Over 160 national, regional, and youth IGF initiatives, and 35 IGF remote hubs also allowed hundreds if not thousands more online participants to contribute to the Forum.

The programme featured over 300 sessions, with eight sub-themes: (1) AI & Emerging Technologies; (2) Avoiding Internet Fragmentation; (3) Cybersecurity, Cybercrime & Online Safety; (4) Data Governance & Trust; (5) Digital Divides & Inclusion; (6) Global Digital Governance & Cooperation; (7) Human Rights & Freedoms; and (8) Sustainability & Environment.

Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

The 8th Annual Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum) (3-4 May) was organized by the UN interagency task team on STI for the SDGs (IATT), convened by UN-DESA and UNCTAD, and the 10-Member Group of high-level representatives appointed by the Secretary General. In line with recent mandates and as in previous years, the STI Forum facilitated discussions on science, technology and innovation cooperation in support of the SDGs. In addition to providing the mandated inputs for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to be held from 10 to 19 July 2023, the Forum took a broader look at the contribution of STI to the achievement of all the SDGs in recognition of the September mid-term review of SDG progress.

Accordingly, the theme for the STI Forum 2023 was: “Science, technology and innovation for accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”.

High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2023

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was held from Monday, 10 July, to Wednesday, 19 July 2023, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. This includes the three-day ministerial segment of the forum from Monday, 17 July, to Wednesday, 19 July 2023 as part of the High-level Segment of the Council. The last day of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC was on Thursday, 20 July 2023. The theme was "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”.

In the forum, participants were able to further discuss the effective and inclusive recovery measures to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and explore actionable policy guidance for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at all levels.

The HLPF in 2023, without prejudice to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs, also reviewed in-depth Goals 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals.

The General Assembly in its resolution 70/299 decided that the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) shall have only one negotiated Political Declaration, covering the different and complementary functions of both sessions of the forum under the auspices of the General Assembly - the Summit, and the forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) when the forum is convened twice in the same year.

Political Declaration adopted at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2023² includes below ICT related issues:

Under Section III. Call to action – turning our world towards 2030, para 37 (d) states that “We will continue increasing investment in inclusive and equitable quality education and life-long

² https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/A%20HLPF%202023%20L1.pdf?_gl=1*uawcse*_ga*NTE3MTcyNDU2LjE2MjA2MTQ4NTE.*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*MTY5NzY4MTI0NC42MC4wLjE2OTc2ODEyNDQuMC4wLjA.

learning opportunities for all, including digital technologies for education. Para 37 (e) emphasizes to take action to bridge the digital divides and spread the benefits of digitalization, and continues as follows “We will expand participation of all countries, in particular developing countries, in the digital economy, including by enhancing their digital infrastructure connectivity, building their capacities and access to technological innovations through stronger partnerships and improving digital literacy. We will leverage digital technology to expand the foundations on which to strengthen social protection systems. We commit to building capacities for inclusive participation in the digital economy and strong partnerships to bring technological innovations to all countries”. Para 37 (q) commits to bridging the science, technology and innovation divides and the responsible use of science, technology, and innovation as drivers of sustainable development and to build the capacities necessary for sustainable transformations.

SDGs and ICT indicators

During 2023, UN DESA served in the steering committee of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. The Partnership is an international, multi-stakeholder initiative that was launched in 2004 to improve the availability and quality of ICT data and indicators, particularly in developing countries. Partnership’s WSIS 2023 session Session 216— ICT Indicators for monitoring international goals and targets highlighted activities of Partners, including future plans to improve the quality and availability of data needed for monitoring the achievement of international goals and targets, such as those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the implementation of WSIS action lines, and the assessment of the Global Digital Compact. The UN SG’s Tech Envoy delivered opening remarks in the session and highlighted i) the need for capacity development efforts especially in developing countries in measuring progress via indicators, ii) bridging the gap between statistical communities and new data sources such as big data and AI, iii) investing in production of near-real time data, or maybe more realistically timely data, iv) using common data models for comparability across regions and for quality and reliable indicators, and finally v) the urgent need for new indicators to measure progress in development goals and for the upcoming Global Digital Compact. He stated that this session may not be as glamorous as maybe some other sessions during this week’s WSIS meeting but stated that for sure one of the most important things since data is crucial for decision making. The panel highlighted the importance of having more timely and disaggregated data to inform public policy, and common data models to ensure comparability between countries. There was also an acknowledgement of the existence of significant data gaps, especially from developing countries and LDCs. For instance, in 9 of the 23 indicators on internet availability, there is at least one data point for fewer than 25% of the countries. Existing initiatives to bridge those gaps include the development of toolkits to aid the data collection from countries, as well as online tools to facilitate the reporting of existing data. However, more effort is needed in this area. Another challenge is the evolving nature of the ICT landscape, with AI and other emerging and disruptive technologies increasingly present in the practice of organizations, governments, and individuals. UN agencies present in the meeting reaffirmed their commitment to their efforts of reviewing the existing list of core ICT indicators.

III. Future actions

In 2024, UN DESA will launch the United Nations E-Government Survey 2024 to continue to support governments in their journey in e-government development. E-government is not an end; it is a means to improving public service delivery, increasing people’s engagement,

enhancing transparency, accountability, and inclusion, and ultimately making life better for all.

UN DESA will also continue to facilitate international and regional collaboration and promote ICTs. The way forward is a new “digital normal” in responding to global challenges and pursuing sustainable development. In that regard, the next edition of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is expected to take place in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the last quarter of 2024. UN DESA, as institutional home to the IGF, will continue to support the Secretary-General to convene the annual IGF meetings as mandated by the General Assembly, and to support the IGF itself, as the key platform for dialogue on Internet governance.