



## High-level Political Forum 2022

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

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Written Statement

**2022 HLPF theme: “*Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”.**

In the face of a pandemic that has devastated communities and prompted a sharp rise in global inequalities, unequal access to digital technologies has emerged as a critical issue.

Many of the 2.9 billion still totally unconnected lost their jobs and incomes overnight. An estimated 1.5 billion children were denied access to schooling because they did not have the devices and high-speed access that would have enabled them to join online classes. Millions of small businesses failed. Ill and infirm people without a connection could not get vital medical advice. And our SDG targets are now at real risk of falling by the wayside.

In his address to the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2022, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said “the potential of digital technologies to help us make up lost ground towards the Sustainable Development Goals is tremendous.”

Yet, today, one third of all humanity remains totally offline, and hundreds of millions more struggle with costly, poor quality connectivity that makes no tangible contribution to improving their lives.

Our urgent challenge, as a global community, is to bridge this gaping ‘connectivity chasm’, so that no-one is left behind by being left offline.

Achieving universal, meaningful connectivity by 2030 is essential for people everywhere to leverage the benefits of rapidly expanding digital economies and societies, and the opportunities they offer.

The call for urgent efforts to accelerate full digital inclusion is emphasized in the Doha Programme of Action, the UN Secretary-General’s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, the ‘Our Common Agenda’ report, and many other key texts.

As with the recent global health crisis, the global connectivity crisis is simply too large for any one entity to solve alone. Multistakeholder collaboration on an unprecedented scale will be vital – including collaboration and coordination across all UN agencies.

The Partner2Connect Digital Coalition established by ITU in partnership with the Office of the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology and UN-OHRLS is the first truly global pledging platform by the UN system focused entirely on connectivity. In its first concentrated pledging drive at ITU’s World Telecommunication Development Conference in Kigali, Rwanda, the coalition amassed more than US\$25 billion in connectivity commitments from governments, the private sector, civil society, and the international community.

At the same time, the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, established in 2010 as a high-level advocacy platform to promote broadband access, regularly issues research and policy recommendations including the annual State of Broadband Reports and Working Group deep-dive publications. Comprising more than 50 leaders and experts spanning different stakeholders, the Commission actively advocates for a recovery agenda based on the three pillars of resilient universal connectivity, affordable access, and the safe use of online services.

Similarly, ITU’s Connect2Recover initiative is helping countries leverage digital technologies to support pandemic recovery and preparedness for future crises.

And in the crucial area of youth education, our Giga partnership with UNICEF to connect every school in the world to the internet and every young person to

information, opportunity and choice has already connected over 3,200 schools and more than one million students in 19 countries.

I look forward to working with you all to rapidly advance our shared global efforts to build back better for a safer, more connected, and more sustainable world.

A world where everyone has digital access that is safe, attractive, and affordable, and where everyone is digitally empowered to build a better future for themselves, and their communities.