Statement at the General Debate of High-Level Political Forum 2023

20 July 2023, Trusteeship Council, UNHQ

10.00am

ITU Statement

Presented by Alex Wong, Senior Advisor, Strategic Engagement and Initiatives

Thank you Chair,

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates:

Good morning and good afternoon.

Digital has moved to the top of Our Common Agenda. It is mentioned 47 times in the Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report released just one week ago.[i]

With only 15 percent of the SDG targets on track at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda,[ii] digital has emerged as a crucial catalyst for sustainable development.

Yet, 2.7 billion people, including two-thirds of the population in Least Developed Countries remains offline.[iii] [iv]

That is one third of humanity cut off from the benefits of digital technologies, with women accounting for a disproportionate and growing share of the global offline population, outnumbering male non-users by 18 percent.[v]

And the cost of Internet services is still too high for the poorest 40 percent of the population in many parts of the world.[vi]

It begs the question: who really stands to benefit from digital transformation?

In a world where 95 percent of the global population is within range of a mobile broadband network,[vii] mere connectivity is not sufficient.

Too many people who could go online decide against it because they do not have the digital skills — or because the experience is not safe, beneficial, or affordable.

What they need is meaningful connectivity.

That is why ITU Member States have recently made universal connectivity and sustainable digital transformation our two strategic goals going forward.

These next few months give us the opportunity to make progress on both fronts.

On 17 September, together with UNDP and our partners, ITU will convene SDG Digital, a day that will put data and digital technologies at the core of SDG rescue efforts, showcasing proven and scalable solutions using digital for each SDG.[viii]

Starting in November, ITU will hold its World Radiocommunication Conference whose outcomes will shape digital development for this decade and beyond.

This year, our conference coincides with COP28, where we will conduct a Green Digital Action track.

And in December, ITU together with our partners will convene the 2nd Partner2Connect Digital Coalition Annual Meeting, to take stock and celebrate progress on the so far over 740 pledges valued at 30.6B USD made by all stakeholders to advance universal connectivity and sustainable digital transformation.

Our goal is simple: address the true environmental costs of digital transformation, while supporting the transition to net zero emissions across the entire economy.

This means striking the right balance between risks and benefits.

As for all SDGs, time is of the essence.

Artificial intelligence and other technologies are racing ahead.

Digital inclusion needs to keep up the pace.

Because coming together on delivering the 2030 Agenda with digital is no longer just an opportunity, it is our joint responsibility.

Thank you.

NOTES

[i] The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition. UN. July 10, 2023. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/

[ii] *Id.*

[iii] World's least developed countries threatened by deepening digital divide. ITU. March 5, 2023. https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/Pages/PR-2023-03-05-facts-and-figures-focus-on-least-developed-countries.aspx

[iv] Internet more affordable and widespread, but world's poorest still shut off from online opportunities. ITU. November 30, 2022. https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/Pages/PR-2022-11-30-Facts-Figures-2022.aspx

[v] https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2022/11/24/ff22-the-gender-digital-divide/

[vi] The affordability of ICT services 2022. ITU. April 2023. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/prices2022/ITU_Price_Brief_2022.pdf (reading, in part: "While ICT services became more affordable globally in 2022, ICT service costs are still too high for the poorest 40% of the population in many parts of the world."

[vii] Global Connectivity Report 2022. ITU. June 6, 2022. https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-ind-global-01-2022/

[viii] Doreen Bogdan-Martin. Harnessing digital to rescue the SDGs. SDG Action. July 4, 2023. https://sdg-action.org/harnessing-digital-to-rescue-the-sdgs/