



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2017

ITU Secretary General's Statement to the General Debate of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment and HLPF Ministerial Segment UNHQ, New York

A central promise of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind. Yet today, more than half of the world's population is still offline, unable to benefit from the positive impact that information and communication technologies (ICTs) could have on their lives. As the UN specialized agency for ICTs, ITU, together with its Members and partners, is committed to leaving no one offline.

We are pleased to see that many countries have reported progress in this area in their voluntary national reviews (VNRs), emphasizing the need to reach people living in remote regions and to reduce differences between communities in urban and rural areas. Digital inclusion of the population has become a priority, as some countries made clear that inadequate ICT infrastructure is "a significant impediment to economic growth and poverty alleviation".

ITU recognizes the role that ICTs can play in eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world, the theme of this year's meeting of the high-level political forum (HLPF) on sustainable development. We are proud to present the report, "Fast-Forward Progress: Leveraging Tech to Achieve the Global Goals" [insert link], showcasing thought pieces from Heads of UN Funds and Programmes, specialized agencies and related organizations. This report is a collective effort of the UN system to articulate how ICTs are being applied in support of these organizations' mandates and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To that end, ITU welcomes the efforts of several countries to leverage ICTs to achieve the SDGs. We note that VNRs featured ICTs more prominently this year, in areas as diverse as digital literacy, smart cities, digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, digital entrepreneurship, data collection, health, youth, agriculture, gender and financial inclusion. Not only does it demonstrate how ICTs cut across issues, but it indicates how countries increasingly rely on ICTs to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

This was one of the main lessons of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2017, the world's largest annual gathering of the ICT for development community, which is coordinated by ITU in close collaboration with all UN agencies. We have submitted the [outcomes](#) of this year's WSIS Forum to the HLPF, especially since many of the inclusive ICT initiatives discussed at the Forum directly affect several of the Goals to be reviewed at HLPF 2017.

ITU reiterates the critical importance of partnerships. We note that a number of countries outlined the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships in their VNRs to help transition to a digital future, implementing measures to attract private investment. Others have made digital tools an integral part of their development cooperation

strategies, be it trying to facilitate Internet access in least developed countries or designing gender-based projects in war-torn regions. ITU strongly believes in partnerships. On April 25th 2017, we signed a Joint Declaration with UNIDO to collaborate on the advancement of the 2030 Agenda. This action-oriented partnership aims to build coalitions and drive collaboration that will help deliver concrete contributions towards achieving SDG 9, an enabler to all SDGs.

As we track global progress towards the 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda, let us remember that access to ICTs is a development indicator and aspiration in and of itself ([UNGA Resolution A/70/125](#)). In its open letter to HLPF 2017, the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, launched by ITU and UNESCO, urges us to work together to harness the opportunities and benefits of ICTs. “This will be critical to achieve the SDGs”, the Commission wrote, “and realize the future we want”.

ITU reaffirms its commitment to leverage the power of ICTs to fast-forward progress on the SDGs and to work with all of you to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity in today’s changing world.

Thank you for your attention.