HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2018

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

As ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao has said recently in the lead-up to our upcoming Plenipotentiary Conference, ITU's highest-level meeting, "**the world needs the SDGs and the SDGs need ICTs**."

This week, **47 countries** presented their strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. ITU, the lead UN agency for ICTs, applauds the efforts of countries to **leverage technology to achieve the SDGs**.

ITU reaffirms our commitment to supporting countries as they digitalize and implement new ICT measures in many critical areas – including smart cities, health, digital entrepreneurship, digital literacy, e-waste, agriculture and smart government. We are encouraged that up to now, many countries have included and relied on ICTs as an essential part of their **VNRs**.

Countries are determined to seize the opportunities of the digital revolution, exploring innovations such as the Internet of Things. **ITU is at the forefront of this revolution.** Just a few weeks ago, we held our second *AI for Good Global Summit* in Geneva, which brought together leading minds in artificial intelligence and humanitarian action from UN sister agencies and the business world in an effort to bring the benefits of AI to bear in accelerating progress towards the SDGs.

Infrastructure is one of the "4 I's" that are critical to bridging the digital divide and achieving the SDGs, **alongside innovation, investment and inclusivity**. ITU commends countries that have made digital infrastructure a priority – especially when it comes to connecting those living in rural and remote areas.

We also congratulate UN Secretary-General António Guterres on the launch of **the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation** and **support efforts to strengthen international cooperation in the digital space**.

A central promise of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind. ITU recognizes that if not managed properly, the wave of technological change might in fact deepen the divide between the **digital "haves" and "have-nots"**, at a time when over half of the world's population is still not using the Internet – let alone more advanced technologies.

ITU is committed to leaving no one offline, working with countries and other stakeholders to invest in **digital innovation**, promote **digital inclusion** and reach out to our youth, women and girls and the most vulnerable among us.