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ACTING ENVOY ON TECHNOLOGY**

Remarks

Seventh multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation
for the SDGs

Thematic session 4: Global digital public goods, digitalization,
artificial intelligence, and connecting the world by 2030
6 May 2022, 11:00 – 12:00 a.m. New York time via Zoom

Dear Anita,

Thank you for the question.

Managing rapid technological change is a defining challenge of our generation. The world has been fundamentally transformed by digital technologies and the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption and global reliance on their benefits.

Yet we find ourselves at a critical inflexion point: it is clear that we cannot reap the full benefits of the digital age without mobilizing the global cooperation needed to mitigate its potential harms.

This is why the United Nations has stepped up to the challenge, first through the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, and now the proposal by the Secretary-General in his Common Agenda, to develop a Global Digital Compact at next year's Summit of the Future. The Digital Compact is a once in a lifetime opportunity to bring all – member states, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders – together to build common understanding on the principles that should underline our digital future and commit together and individually, to adhere to these principles.

The issues that are being discussed in this session – the fundamental importance of global connectivity, the role of digital public goods and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, are all critical parts of the UN's broader efforts to galvanize digital cooperation, implement the Roadmap and build the Compact itself. My Office, the Office of the Tech Envoy, coordinates multistakeholder roundtables on these aspects, and works with many partners, within the UN and beyond to achieve the Secretary-General's vision of a more open, free and secure digital future for all. For instance, two weeks ago, my Office and the ITU launched targets to achieve universal, meaningful connectivity for everyone everywhere. We work closely with the

Digital Public Goods Alliance, here today, on the issue of Digital Public Goods. Here at the STI Forum, just yesterday, we had a multistakeholder event that discussed the critical importance of connectivity in emergencies; and this morning, we, together with our fellow UN agencies, reflected on what it means for the system to better support countries in achieving the SDGs through digital technologies.

All of these issues, and the topics discussed today go to the heart of the SDGs, because leveraging digital technology is critical to leaving no one behind in this digital age. Yet, we have also seen how digital technologies have sparked some of our world's greatest controversies, divisions and inequalities. Geopolitical gridlock is at an all-time high with rising debates over values-based approaches to technology, tech regulation, and eroding digital trust. More fundamentally, digital has become – in some ways, the new face of global inequality, with accelerating digitalization leaving behind people and communities that remain disconnected. Over 2.9 billion people, the majority women and in developing countries, are still offline. So, the proposed Global Digital Compact is a means for us to focus on and address these issues, to forge a new, shared vision for global digital cooperation; which is exactly what the Heads of States and Governments had called for, in the UN75 Declaration.

The STI Forum, as a multistakeholder, open platform at the intersection of technology, innovation and policy at the UN, can play an important role in preparing for the Digital Compact, by contributing thoughts and reflections on these issues. The Office of the Envoy on Technology is committed to working with all of you, leveraging on the Digital Cooperation Roadmap, to build consensus on concrete actions and outcomes, ahead of the Compact. In the coming weeks, we will be opening a public, inclusive space on our Office website to gather inputs and views to prepare the ground for the Digital Compact, and I invite you all to engage with us, and contribute to this.

Before I conclude, let me add that it is not lost upon me that we face these digital challenges at one of the most globally divided times in recent history. But this makes our commitment and determination to come together, in spite of our differences, even more necessary. And I will close with the words of Tim Berners Lee, one of the founders of the Internet. He said “The goal of the Web is to serve humanity. We build it now so that those who come to it later will be able to create things that we cannot ourselves imagine.”

Thank you for your attention.
