

Fourth United Nations Conference on Small Island Developing States

St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, May 27-30, 2024

**Statement for General Debate by the
International Telecommunication Union**

American University of Antigua, Plenary Hall

Day and Time TBC

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), it is an honour to address you at this Fourth United Nations Conference on Small Island Developing States.

We believe that digital plays a crucial role in addressing the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by SIDS and has the potential to accelerate the pace of SIDS to achieve the 2030 development agenda. Since the last SIDS conference held in 2014 in Samoa, ITU has implemented a plethora of projects in a number of critical areas.

In delivering support to Small Island Developing States, we are guided by our two strategic goals namely:

- **universal connectivity** aimed at enabling and fostering universal access to affordable, high quality and secure telecommunications/ICTs, and
- **sustainable digital development** aimed at fostering equitable and inclusive use of telecommunications/ICTs to empower people and societies for sustainable development.

It is pleasing to note that there has been considerable progress in ICTs since the adaptation of the Samoa Pathway. For instance, the share of people in SIDS using the internet has risen two-fold, from 33 to 67 percent. In the area of bridging the digital gender gap, SIDS have emerged as global frontrunners and have nearly achieved digital gender parity.

Yet, disparities exist within and among small island states. While 84% of urban citizens enjoy connectivity, only 44% of rural citizens are connected. Furthermore, only 63% of citizens are subscribed to mobile broadband and only 10% to fixed broadband. This worries us. Numerous studies have found a positive impact of broadband on economic growth, although the estimate of its actual magnitude varies. For example, a 10% increase in fixed broadband penetration has been found to increase economic growth by 1.47%.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recognizing that climate change and natural disasters disproportionately affect SIDS, a core part of our work includes the development and deployment of Early Warning Systems, and integration of digital into disaster management, using satellite technology for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Before I conclude, I want to remind ourselves that partnerships work. For instance, we in 2022 we launched a Partner2Connect Digital Coalition which has attracted 46.08 US dollars' worth of pledges. Fifteen percent of the mobilized Partner2Connect Coalition pledges, worth 25 billion US dollars, are to be implemented in Small Island and Developing States. To operationalize these pledges, we have already organized and held 30 Matchmaking Roundtables across the globe which generated firm projects some of which are already under implementation. We call upon industry, and other partners to collaborate with us to connect SIDS in a meaningful and affordable way for their sustainable development.

Ahead lies an excellent opportunity for the development of SIDS through digital. Let us grasp it, together.

Word Count: 448