Remarks

by

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High Representative

for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

at the briefing to

Permanent Missions of the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS on the Report of the High-Level Panel on Digital Co-operation and the Preparations for the 75th UN Anniversary

11:00-12:30

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Conference Room 5, United Nations
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear Colleagues,

I would like to welcome you to this briefing for the Permanent Missions of the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

I have the pleasure of convening this event together with Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond, who is the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Digital Cooperation and the Preparations for the Seventy-Fifth United Nations Anniversary.

Today’s briefing will focus on the report of the UN Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. Mr. Drummond will also provide a brief update on the on-going preparations for the 75th UN Anniversary.

We welcome this opportunity to support the Secretary-General’s Initiatives.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Digital technology is a topic that is of enormous significance to all countries. It is perhaps even more important to the groups of countries that are present in this room, given their individual vulnerabilities, that make it challenging for them to be globally competitive.

There are concerns about the impact of emerging technologies on employment, especially for low-skilled workers, as well as competitiveness, which could make attraction of investment to LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS even more difficult. However, there is also the expectation that these groups of countries can benefit through inter alia; better connectivity, more efficient delivery of basic services, disaster management and innovation.

The reality of the matter is that while developed countries and countries with more advanced technologies are currently grappling with the opportunities and challenges associated with frontier technologies, there is very little conversation over how these new technologies affect the production patterns and specialization of these countries as well as their ability to structurally transform their economies. Conversely, little is being discussed about how the vulnerable countries could embrace and reap the benefits of these technologies.

The international community in SDG Target 9.c. commits to “significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020”. This target will certainly be missed as many vulnerable countries are struggling to get their people connected to the internet. In LDCs, only 17.5 percent have internet connection, in comparison to 81 percent in developed countries. In addition, there are indications that the growth in penetration of households with internet access at home, in LDCs, is slowing down.

These countries are far behind when it comes to broadband or high-speed internet, which is at the core of driving the new technologies. Recent data from ITU shows that there are four times as many mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in developed countries as there are in LDCs.
Yet, broadband Internet can help all countries to leap-frog in various areas, including education, health, government services, and trade. Broadband Internet can also deliver innovative services and applications and trigger new business opportunities.

Given these challenges, it is therefore a concern that frontier technologies could increase inequality between richer countries and those that are left behind.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight a few findings of a recent study that ITU and my office conducted on the impact of broadband in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. The report confirms that broadband has positive economic impact in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. For example, our study found that a 10 percent increase in mobile broadband penetration leads to between 2.5 percent and 2.8 per cent increase in GDP per capita. The increase in GDP per capital is influenced by among others, increased investment opportunities, improved education and skills, better job opportunities and, increased labour force participation.

Another important finding of our report is that the economic impact of both fixed and mobile broadband is greater in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDs than in developed countries. This indicates that a policy of further investment in improving broadband access, connectivity and uptake in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS could yield higher economic returns than in other countries.

A summary of this report has been circulated in the room. The full report can be found on both the ITU and OHRLLS website.

I would like to end my opening remarks by stressing that LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS can and should benefit from the digital economy. They should be at the center of discussions related to this topic, including, when setting norms at the international level. Otherwise, these vulnerable countries will be left further behind. As the preparations of the Fifth United Nations Conference on LDCs have started, my hope is also that the outcomes of your engagement on issues of digital Cooperation feed into negotiations on the formulation of the programme of action for LDCs for the decade 2021-2030.

Other groups should also find the various avenues where elements of the initiative we are discussing today, as well as, the broader discussion on digital interdependence could be incorporated.

Without further ado, I call upon Fabrizio to make his presentation.

You have the floor, Fabrizio.