UN-OHRLLS

Statement

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High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

Presentation of the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation
The State of the Digital World Today and Implementing the Roadmap

Thursday, 11 June 2020, 13:30 – 15:30
Virtual Meeting

Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations
Excellencies,
Distinguished Moderator and Panelists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to first express my gratitude to Under-Secretary General Fabrizio Hochschild for ensuring that the process leading to this roadmap was inclusive.

Thank you for enabling the strong engagement from the global south and especially the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

They represent 91 countries with a combined population of more than 1 billion.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact have shown us the urgency to close the digital divide which is an added dimension of ever growing inequalities.

The Secretary General's roadmap once more alerts us that 87 per cent of individuals in developed countries used the Internet in 2019. The access and use in the least developed countries stood at just 19 per cent!   In the landlocked developing countries and small island developing states, the figure is also below 50 per cent, on average.

A large share of people in these countries simply cannot participate in virtual learning. They do not have the means to work from home, telemedicine is a distant dream and forget about staying connected with their families and friends.

They are unable to listen and participate in conversations like this one.

The time is NOW for us to make the right decisions, take immediate action and implement initiatives. We cannot leave them behind. We need to ensure their effective inclusion and participation in an ever more digitally connected world and humanity.

So, how can we support these vulnerable countries?

We need to first get the basics right.

We need to do so because we know that to connect digitally with the world is not a luxury but a precondition to attaining sustainable development and address climate change.

It is NOW that we must invest in the necessary infrastructure for all.

This will require both public funding and international support.

The reality remains that very little aid is used for this purpose. Only a small fraction of official development assistance is dedicated to digitilization.

The Financing for Sustainable Development Report is clear. Only 1 per cent of project funding by multilateral development banks targeted the information and communications technology sector between 2012 and 2016. This needs to change.

Once people have access, there are so many productive ways to uses digital technology from basic service provision to rural areas, enhancing financial inclusion and enabling access to e-education, e-health and e-governance.

Digital technology is at the core of participating in the global production and value chain.

We know that Least Developed Countries want and need to build their productive base and engage in the global value chain as producers and not just consumers. Yet, it is a major challenge. But, this is the moment to move a challenge to an opportunity.

We here have the privilege of being part of this discussion and privilege means responsibility. We should think about how small companies in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS can benefit from the digital economy. Getting small firms to benefit is not trivial and we have to think creatively, if vulnerable countries are to also benefit from the opportunities that the digital world offers.

Now is the time to boost all dimensions of Broadband Internet access -- availability, accessibility, content and capacity to use and this must include the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

Let us move words to action.

I thank you!