

UAE Statement to Preparatory Meeting of World Summit on the Information Society

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Presenter:

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Location:

United Nations

Co-facilitators, Excellencies and distinguished colleagues,

The UAE delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier by South Africa on behalf of G77 and China.

The UAE appreciates the opportunity to share its perspectives on the General Assembly's ten-year review of the implementation of outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society.

As both a developing country and a development partner, we have seen and welcomed the last decade's miraculous surge in connectivity, tele-density, data dissemination, and data production. With 96% global mobile coverage, ICT is clearly no longer the preserve of the rich, but a global phenomenon that has made in-roads into communities considered unreachable until recently. We have also seen the growing pains that governments and people undergo as they struggle to manage and leverage this unprecedented rate of change, but we do not believe that they should in any way distract from the overwhelmingly positive narrative of ICT's expansion.

The goal of an inclusive, people centered information society remains valid, and the UAE believes we should take the opportunity of the review to double our efforts to harness ICT for both countries' development and the realization of individual's professional and personal potential. Our belief in ICT has driven large-scale investment domestically and internationally in ICT, policy reform, and ardent support of the WSIS process at the ITU and the other partner UN agencies, including sponsorship of the WSIS Forum since 2011.

Co-facilitators,

From our own experience, we would especially highlight 6 trends in the last 10 years that should be noted and furthered:

1. High level of Mobile Penetration
2. The rise of Broadband Penetration
3. The remarkable penetration of information across the globe. While bridging the digital divide must remain a top priority, it is important to recognize how much data access, creation, and beneficial application there is now in all countries vs 10 years ago.
4. The rise of public-private partnerships, which enable capacity-building, faster ICT deployment and advancement, and reduce the digital divide.
5. Liberalization of the telecom sector, especially to allow competition among firms and to welcome foreign participation, again strengthening the quality and reach of ICT.
6. The huge potential of renewable energy to reduce both the environmental footprint and power costs of ICT, especially in rural and remote areas.

Nevertheless, the road to implementation of WSIS action lines is not a straight line, and globally there are still many challenges, which are delaying WSIS implementation. We would highlight 7 in particular:

1. More than half of the world's population is still not connected to the Internet, and therefore we need to set ourselves a target of 100% connectivity ideally by 2020 and no later than 2030.

2. We also need to start defining access and connectivity in terms of quality. It is no longer sufficient to have Internet if you are waiting 10 minutes for Google to load, or unable to get a signal half the day. The WSIS process should define different tiers of access, and aim to move all countries up the ladder, with targets linked to 2020 and 2030.
3. There continues to be misalignment between capital and risk perception around ICT investment, especially in developing countries. ODA by itself is not a solution given the scale of investment needed, but the UAE believes that ICT – like roads, energy, and other tools of self-empowerment and mobility – should be a priority among donors, who should focus on how they can de-risk the sector to crowd-in private capital. Subordination, loan guarantees, insurance, capacity-building, and willingness-to-pay research are some of many of the interventions that could be considered.
4. At the same time, domestic policy reform remains critical to attracting investment. Independent telecom regulators, public-private partnerships, and openness to foreign investment are, we believe, some of the key determinants of WSIS implementation in the coming years.
5. Gender must be mainstreamed in WSIS related strategies and implementation, with a goal of 50-50 in at least opportunity if not outcome. We see the ethical case and the business case for gender equality as the same, and we see equal education as the most powerful tool for realizing them.
6. Another need is further improvement in management and use of radio-frequency spectrum/satellite orbits for development, as well as deployment of low-cost telecommunication networks, including satellite networks for all countries, taking into account special needs of developing and least developed countries.
7. We also see inclusion as central requirement of future WSIS work, notably among youth and people with disabilities and vulnerable people, especially in developing countries and among marginalized communities. This means both outcomes to achieve by 2030, as well as these groups' participation in the WSIS process, so that they can shape the direction of the Information Society and benefit from it.

Lastly, in terms of international-level governance, we would make three points for consideration during the WSIS review:

1. ICT connectivity for all as much work remains to achieve the people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information society as envisaged in WSIS, with new divides emerging, both within and between countries. WSIS framework has done little to help address these issues. The 10-year review could be an opportunity to refocus attention back to the development dimension of WSIS.
2. Internet governance and role of IGF is a second priority as Internet related public policy issues would continue to evolve in the coming period, specially the amount of work being done at the ITU by the council working group on internet public policy issues.
3. Enhanced capacity building is the third priority to work on, as the gap is widening between the developed and developing countries in this regard.

Thank you Co-facilitators.