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Chair: Ms. Alateibi (Vice-Chair) (United Arab Emirates)

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In the absence of Mr. Skinner-Kl e Arenales (Guatemala), Ms. Alateibi (United Arab Emirates), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Agenda item 17: Information and communications technologies for sustainable development
(A/73/66-E/2018/10)

1. **Ms. Sirimanne** (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels” (A/73/66-E/2018/10), said that the report had been prepared on the basis of information provided by 33 United Nations entities and other stakeholders.

2. Global adoption of information and communications technologies (ICTs) had been steady. The latest estimates from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) showed a growing adoption of mobile phone technology and broadband networks and services. However, Internet access was far from universal: in 2017, half the world’s population still did not have access. In least developed countries, only 17 per cent had Internet access, compared to 81 per cent in developed regions. The many types of digital divides, ranging from gender divide to generational and geographic divides needed to be addressed.

3. The report highlighted the power of the current technological revolution, which resulted from the reduced costs of collecting, storing and processing data and was underpinned by such technologies as robotics, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and 3D printing. Digital technologies allowed developing countries greater participation in global markets, value chains and knowledge-sharing; they rewarded creativity and innovation, offering new ways to generate income – particularly for women and marginalised groups – and creating new types of jobs and opportunities for greater financial inclusion. However, those technologies also entailed risks. For example, automation and artificial intelligence could displace manual and professional jobs currently performed by people. While the net impact of technological development and its effect on labour markets and jobs remained uncertain, radical reforms in education and training would be needed to allow countries to benefit from it.

4. UNCTAD estimated that global production of ICT goods and services currently accounted for an estimated 6.5 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP).

Over 100 million people were employed in the ICT services sectors alone. Global e-commerce sales totalled US\$ 25.7 trillion in 2016 and were rapidly expanding. ICT service exports had grown by 40 per cent amid slow global economic recovery in 2010–2015, which served as evidence of the digital economy’s immense potential. However, developing countries and, particularly, least developed countries, were not ready to take advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalization, and the e-commerce divide was enormous. While over 70 per cent of the population in several developed countries made purchases online, that figure was less than 3 per cent for least developed countries. Countries needed to invest in e-commerce readiness if they were to successfully face increased competition in global markets.

5. The need for more comprehensive data on ICTs, which was essential for evidence-based policymaking, would intensify. To address that gap, the UNCTAD Intergovernmental Group of Experts on e-Commerce and the Digital Economy had recently established a Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy.

6. The growing reliance of public services, business and individuals on the Internet and related information technology (IT) systems had increased their vulnerability to cyberattacks. The report highlighted the security risks associated with Internet of Things; there were currently 20 billion digitally connected devices, an amount which was expected to double in five years and increase progressively thereafter. However, no internationally-agreed standards existed for new devices, which rendered them vulnerable to large-scale cyberattacks.

7. The evolving information society posed challenges for both national and international governance. In 2017, debates on various governance-related issues had continued to take place in fora such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). Although the working group of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) had held five meetings in 2016–2018, the complexity and political sensitivity of the topic had prevented it from agreeing on a set of recommendations on how to enhance cooperation.

8. The newly-launched High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, which had a total of 20 members from governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and the technical community, had been asked to contribute to the broader public debate on the importance of cooperative and interdisciplinary

approaches to ensure a safe and inclusive digital future for all, taking into account human rights norms; it was expected to identify policy, research and information gaps and make proposals to strengthen international cooperation in the digital space.

9. Progress towards inclusion in the information society remained highly unequal, a disadvantage that would probably only be exacerbated as the pace of innovation intensified. International multi-stakeholder cooperation was required to address that challenge, as well as challenges such as cybersecurity. A new wave of technological innovation often termed the “fourth industrial revolution” was likely to radically and pervasively change the nature of the information society, which would not only represent new opportunities for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals, but also entail new challenges, given its uncertain effects on existing economic and social structures. Countries and companies that invested in infrastructure and capabilities were likely to benefit from those innovations, whereas countries which lacked the resources to do so were at serious risk of being left behind.

10. International dialogue on governance issues, including regulation of online markets, the role and responsibilities of global corporations and the relationship between different national jurisdictions, would continue and intensify over the coming years. The international community must ensure the WSIS vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society in the context of rapid and unpredictable technological changes.

11. **Mr. Ríos Sánchez** (Mexico), asked what challenges UNCTAD had experienced when connecting with other organizations and entities within the United Nations system and what obstacles needed to be overcome as UNCTAD continued to make headway on those issues.

12. **Ms. Sirimanne** (UNCTAD) said that, as the Secretary-General’s report had indicated, 33 United Nations entities and other international organizations and stakeholders had come together within the framework of WSIS to consider everything that had been collectively accomplished. An enormous amount of demands were placed on the United Nations system, and particularly UNCTAD, by developing countries seeking to build their capacity. UNCTAD possessed expertise, as it had a very large and effective digital economy programme, but with a staff of only five to deliver it. While it was distressing to see the enormity of existing needs, UNCTAD simply did not have the

funding to meet them on that scale. That was a problem faced by many United Nations entities.

13. **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

14. **Mr. El Ashmawy** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that ICTs were key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and had great potential for accelerating human progress. The creation, development and diffusion of new innovations and technologies and associated know-how were powerful drivers for economic growth and sustainable development.

15. The Secretary-General’s report once again emphasized the critical need to bridge digital divides within and between countries. A new wave of innovation had shown how difficult it was to anticipate the pace at which specific ICTs would be adopted and, therefore, to develop appropriate policies to maximize potential benefits and mitigate potential risks. The gender disparity in science and technology was a matter of growing concern, as well as significantly lower levels of Internet use among older persons, rural residents and persons with disabilities; low literacy levels also had an adverse effect on usage rates.

16. The Group of 77 and China highlighted the growing importance of ICTs to sustainable development in areas such as health, education, knowledge-sharing, agricultural development, promotion of peace, and responses to climate change, including early warning systems and disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response. It was crucial to address key issues that would allow the entire international community to harness the potential of ICTs and innovation towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It was important to reduce and eliminate all digital divides between and within countries and between women and men through, among other measures, more conducive policy environments and strengthened international cooperation to improve affordability, access, education, capacity-building, multilingualism, cultural preservation, investment and appropriate financing. The Group welcomed United Nations forums, panels and meetings aimed at harnessing the potential of technology and data for sustainable development and identifying opportunities and avenues to overcome developing countries’ structural challenges, including the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation and the United Nations World Data Forum.

17. It was crucial for developed countries and relevant stakeholders to provide enhanced and coordinated support to developing countries to address the digital divide through technology transfer, including on

concessional and preferential terms. There was an urgent need to channel effective and sustainable technical assistance and capacity-building adapted to the specific needs and constraints of developing countries and, particularly, African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and countries and peoples under foreign occupation, including countries in situations of conflict and post-conflict countries, while recognizing the serious challenges faced by many middle-income countries.

18. The Group of 77 and China also attached great importance to the full and effective implementation of the outcomes of both the Geneva and Tunis phases of WSIS at the regional and international levels, including the provisions on Internet governance and enhanced cooperation. In an increasingly interdependent world, it was important to strengthen developing countries' representation and participation in Internet governance, especially in IGF, to ensure the stability, security and continuity of the Internet. The Group urged the CSTD Working Group to develop recommendations on further cooperation as envisioned under the Tunis Agenda. The use of such technologies must also be fully compatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

19. **Ms. Beckles** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that CARICOM recognized that ICTs were instrumental to achieving sustainable and inclusive development, and particularly to the Goals on poverty reduction, education, health, the environment and oceans, and gender equality, while providing a vehicle through which good governance, social accountability and improved service delivery could be achieved. CARICOM members faced unique development challenges. Given their small size, remoteness and narrow resource and export base, small island developing States were limited in their efforts to achieve development. The constraints were exacerbated by the impact of climate change, including extreme weather events such as hurricanes, rising sea levels and coastal erosion.

20. Technology and innovation provided an opportunity to circumvent those inherent limitations. However, accelerated technological change, combined with the pressures of globalization, had expanded the digital divide between the North and South. In that regard, CARICOM noted that the Secretary-General's report had highlighted that those kinds of disadvantages were likely to increase as the pace of technological innovation intensified.

21. In keeping with the ethical imperative of leaving no one behind, it was incumbent upon the Organization to ensure that the benefits of ICTs, including new technologies, were available to all. CARICOM member States stood to benefit considerably from the transfer of technologies, including by developing early warning systems that could help them better mitigate the devastation of severe and unpredictable weather events and save lives and livelihoods. It was therefore crucial that small island developing States be integrated into meaningful and equitable participation in the global information society.

22. Implementing the recently-approved CARICOM Single ICT Space required technical expertise. The Caribbean Community therefore echoed the call on the international community to enhance support to developing countries through strengthened capacity-building and preferential access to financing. Given the importance of mobilizing financial resources towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, CARICOM looked forward to the third annual Economic and Social Council Forum on financing for development. It also welcomed progress made towards operationalizing the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, and hoped that the annual multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals would foster technological and innovative solutions.

23. CARICOM was also aware that ICTs could be exploited by terrorist and criminal organizations. While the Caribbean region had endeavoured to reduce its vulnerability through cybersecurity initiatives, it needed to further collaborate and engage with the international community. CARICOM therefore reiterated its call for support through international multi-stakeholder cooperation in improving cybersecurity in the region. It also underscored the inclusiveness of WSIS in providing a platform for addressing ICT-related challenges.

24. In view of the gender digital divide in access to ICTs, including in education and employment, CARICOM welcomed the initiative of ITU to commemorate International Girls in ICT Day. The Caribbean Telecommunications Union continued to be a useful public educational tool in encouraging greater regional collaboration in the development of regional ICT policies and solutions. CARICOM urged the development and implementation of viable strategies that bridged the digital divide and produced lasting positive change throughout the Caribbean region.

25. **Mr. Ligoya** (Malawi) said that modern innovations in ICTs were transforming economies and societies. The importance of those technologies to least developed countries was enshrined in target 9.c;

however, ICTs must be adapted to the specific development needs of countries that were furthest behind. Progress towards inclusion in the information society remained highly unequal; much more needed to be done to achieve universal connectivity and maximize the value of ICTs in sustainable development.

26. Between 2011 and 2016, mobile subscription rates had risen rapidly in least developed countries, while Internet access remained low. If current trends continued, it would take those countries more than 15 years to get over half their citizens online. Access to ICTs in least developed countries was influenced by a range of factors such as infrastructure, land area, population density and poor ICT value chain or ecosystem. Above all, those countries lacked standard national backbones and related elements such as data centres and Internet exchanges, as well as access to reliable electricity, which was available to only 39 per cent of the population, and poor fibre optic backbones in rural and underserved areas.

27. Access to mobile networks and services had opened up new opportunities for development in areas such as farming, health and banking, and had driven development of new businesses and business models. The mobile banking services introduced in some least developed countries represented genuine opportunities for individuals and small businesses, and had a tangible impact on poverty eradication, gender equality and employment opportunities and reduction of inequality.

28. A sustainable Internet ecosystem was required for least developed countries to harness digital technology for social and economic development. Developing the national backbone and connectivity to regional and global hubs entailed substantial investments and technical know-how, and least developed countries needed increased support from development partners in that regard, through a combination of official development assistance and foreign direct investment. For example, the World Bank supported the Pacific Region Connectivity Programme, which financed submarine cables. Similar support should be provided for all least developed countries.

29. **Ms. Zahir** (Maldives), speaking on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), expressed the hope that future reports of the Secretary-General on the item under consideration would specifically address the special circumstances of small island developing States and the current state of ICTs in those States. AOSIS acknowledged the Internet Society's small island developing States connectivity report, whose findings should be mainstreamed.

30. Due to the geographical isolation, dispersed populations, remoteness from markets and infrastructure vulnerability of small island developing States, the role of ICTs in their social, economic and financial life could not be overstated. Those States were separated from sources of upstream connectivity by great distances over open seas, which negatively affected the business case for laying cable to serve smaller islands. Susceptibility to natural disasters and the negative effects of climate change also made them more vulnerable to communications infrastructure disruption.

31. Despite those challenges, connectivity, especially mobile connectivity, had improved significantly over the previous decade, and most small island developing States were connected to at least one submarine cable. However, affordability and access remained a concern, as well as knowledge and skills development gaps that prevented island peoples from harnessing the potential of ICTs. Global partnerships were urgently needed both to upgrade infrastructure and to enable education and awareness on the strategic use of ICTs. Otherwise, the digital divide between developed and developing countries would continue to exacerbate global inequality.

32. ICTs presented tremendous opportunities for transformative change in such areas as education, disaster risk management and financial services. Through ICTs, students could gain basic digital literacy and advanced career skills, even in the face of shortages of teachers and materials. During natural disasters, critical technological responses enabled by ICTs included early warning systems, communications and delivery of supplies, and real-time access to data and information on evacuation zones.

33. ICTs had helped significantly in enhancing financial inclusion and were also being used to combat such challenges as the recent decline in correspondent banking relationships in the Caribbean and the Pacific, which had negatively affected already fragile economies by disrupting the flow of remittances. ICTs must be available and accessible for all. Enhanced reporting and analysis on the impact of ICTs would be an important tool to track progress and measure impacts.

34. **Mr. Falusi** (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that ICTs had proven to be a powerful tool to tackle pressing issues including access to health care and clean water, economic growth and environmental sustainability. The information society and knowledge-based digital economy were the guiding forces behind global growth and development.

35. Building an African information society for future generations would help the continent achieve development goals and integration into the transformative global digital economy. In that context, the African Union had adopted a Continental ICT Strategy for Africa to guide ICT development until 2025. The Strategy focused on seven themes: postal and telecommunications infrastructure, capacity development, e-applications and services, enabling environment and governance, mobilization of resources and partnerships, industrialization, and research and development. The African Union was also promoting harmonization of the policy and regulatory framework for the sector and had broadened its strategic agenda to include issues related to accessibility, electronic transactions, Internet governance and cybersecurity. The African Group hoped that the introduction of the .africa top-level domain for the continent would enhance the local digital economy.

36. To address challenges such as the regulation and protection of online space and infrastructure, cybersecurity, privacy and data protection and child protection, partnerships were required to exchange experience and apply compatible standards. In that regard, the African Union had adopted the African Union Convention on Cyberspace Security and the Protection of Personal Data, covering many related issues including e-commerce, data protection and cybercrime, with a special focus on national cybersecurity and on racism, xenophobia and child pornography. African nations would be able to enact personal data protection laws and national cybersecurity strategies for the first time in implementation of the Convention.

37. The pivotal role of ICTs in the enhancement of international trade was clear. Africa was committed to their use through partnerships to establish and properly manage critical ICT infrastructure as a means of boosting both continental and global trade. Greater investment and the allocation of adequate resources would be key to preventing Africa from being left behind on the path to the information society. The African Group called on the international community to take relevant steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, inclusive, people-centred, development-oriented information society in line with the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.

38. **Mr. Ram** (India) said that instant communication and increasingly affordable real-time information through ICTs had transformed almost every sector of human endeavour and had great potential to accelerate inclusive growth and development and create knowledge societies. ICTs provided a strong foundation for the enhancement of sustainable development

interventions. However, improved regulatory and policy frameworks and skills development across Governments, businesses and civil society would be required to realize their full potential. The stark digital divide between developed and developing countries must be bridged.

39. The remarkable success of the Indian IT industry globally was well known. His Government had placed technology at the heart of the country's growth through policies such as Digital India, Make in India and Startup India. The Digital India programme aimed to bridge the digital divide, empower vulnerable sections of the population and improve governance. It was estimated that Digital India initiatives could boost the country's GDP by up to \$1 trillion by 2025. A national digital communications policy adopted in 2018 aimed to provide broadband for all, create 4 million jobs in the digital communications sector, increase the digital communications share of GDP to 8 per cent, enhance the country's contribution to global value chains and ensure digital sovereignty.

40. In a landmark success in the area of financial inclusion, the *Aadhar* biometric individual identification system had been combined with banking services and mobile phone technologies, and more than 1.2 billion Indian citizens had been issued identity cards. A cash benefit transfer scheme had also enabled over 320 million new bank accounts to be opened for more efficient and transparent service delivery. In the health care sector, a specialized application called e-VIN was providing real-time access to information about the availability of vaccines. ICTs were also linking markets for produce through a national agriculture market dashboard called e-NAM, and a direct marketing platform for women entrepreneurs entitled Mahila Haat had been created. India remained committed to strengthening global partnerships through the transformative impact of technology to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

41. **Mr. Kulikov** (Russian Federation) said that ICTs were among the main factors that determined the level of sustainable development in the modern world, and their dissemination and expanded accessibility were integral to expanding possibilities for a more effective response to concrete development issues. There was a direct connection between implementing the decisions of WSIS and implementing the 2030 Agenda with a view to building a knowledge-based society that offered universal and egalitarian use of the possibilities and potential of modern ICTs, as well as to increasing international partnership in the area of science and technology.

42. The development of the digital economy would be a decisive force for achieving modernization and improvements and contributing to overall economic growth. New business models and the creation of information products and services must play a key role, as well as the inclusion of the various population strata in economic activity and the development of relevant social relations and of human capital. In that connection, it was necessary to create an atmosphere conducive to investment and innovation, as well as an appropriate regulatory framework that included ICTs in national and sectoral development strategies. At the same time, regulating ICT development must be balanced with improving security and stimulating the development of digital technologies.

43. To ensure the overall and long-term benefits of using ICTs in the context of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals, it was crucial to strengthen efforts on overcoming the disparity between developed and developing countries in the area of digital technologies and their accessibility, affordability and use. Expanding access to broadband communication would play a decisive role in that process. Digital technologies could be successfully developed only if the digital infrastructures, platforms and decisions needed for an effective, inclusive and safe digital economy were compatible, interoperable and scalable, among other factors. The United Nations was the fundamental institution for international law and intergovernmental cooperation in the area of global ICT infrastructure management, including Internet regulation issues.

44. **Ms. Cue Delgado** (Cuba), referring to the persistent gaps between developed and developing countries in terms of access to ICTs, said that the emergence of new technologies, such as the Internet of Things, blockchains, cloud computing and artificial intelligence, could deepen the digital divide if the developed countries did not show the necessary political will and commitment in terms of financing, investment, training, infrastructure development, knowledge dissemination, intellectual property and technology transfer.

45. ICTs should be used in the service of development, peace and the spread of knowledge and to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and social exclusion, not as an instrument of war, interventionism, destabilization, subversion, unilateralism or terrorism. The covert and illegal use by individuals, organizations and States of computer systems of other nations to attack third countries, which raised the spectre of conflict, could be checked only through cooperation between all States. Cyberspace and Internet access should be treated as common goods of all humanity, that were subject to

democratic and participatory governance based on international law and multilateralism.

46. Her Government was striving to develop an inclusive information and knowledge society focused on the person and sustainable development. Those efforts were being pursued in spite of the economic, commercial and financial blockade that had been imposed by the United States of America on Cuba for more than half a century. From May 2017 to May 2018, the impact of the blockade on ICTs in Cuba had been felt most keenly in telecommunications, with losses in that sector amounting to more than \$60 million.

47. **Mr. Alnaqshbandi** (Iraq) said that rapid progress in ICTs was having profound economic and social effects in numerous areas. Leaving no one behind would mean providing international assistance to developing countries such as his own. Iraq had put in place an ICT strategy to close the gap between it and the more developed countries. It was promoting higher education and research through the provision of laboratory facilities and support for gifted students. He expressed gratitude for the assistance provided to Iraq by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

48. In 2005, his Government had established a separate Ministry of Science and Technology. Unfortunately, austerity measures following the decline in oil prices had required that Ministry to be absorbed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Since 2014, his country had also been fighting vicious terrorism perpetrated by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which had decimated research facilities and educational institutions in the cities it had controlled. Iraq was in need of support from the international community to restore its scientific and technical infrastructure.

49. **Mr. Ríos Sánchez** (Mexico) said that the key role played by ICTs in people's lives made it imperative to address the digital divides, especially the divide between women and men. Access for all was essential. To ensure that ICTs had a positive impact on national efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, infrastructure, laws and institutions must be modernized and capacity developed to create the necessary cutting-edge digital ecosystems. In 2013, his Government had launched a national digital strategy to harness the rapid changes in technology for the country's development. According to the United Nations e-Government Survey, Mexico was the leading country in Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of online services and second in terms of e-participation. The United Nations had acknowledged his country's efforts to foster open

government and citizen participation and improve institutional coordination, transparency and ease of access to online services.

50. The potential impact of exponential advances in technology and innovation on efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda had been underlined at the third multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, which had been co-chaired by Mexico and Japan, and would be a constant theme of the work of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and other bodies. All United Nations entities and specialized agencies must take a cross-cutting approach to the issue of technology, which was an inherent component of all the Sustainable Development Goals.

51. **Ms. Chen** (Singapore) said that Singapore believed that new and emerging technologies would pave the way to a better future for everyone. Her Government's Smart Nation initiative had been launched with a view to empowering people to use technology to enable them to live meaningful and fulfilled lives. In 2018, Singapore had released its Digital Government Blueprint that featured a Moments of Life initiative that aimed to deliver in one application all the Government services that Singaporeans needed at each phase of life. Under her Government's ICT Industry Transformation Roadmaps, small and medium-sized enterprises received help in building digital capabilities. The SkillsFuture programme provided lifelong learning opportunities, including assistance for persons at risk of being displaced by technological change, and training in ICTs for technology professionals. The Digital Readiness Blueprint had been launched in 2018 to ensure that everyone had the access, literacy skills and confidence to use digital technologies in everyday life. Digital inclusion programmes, including subsidized broadband access for low-income households and assistive technology support for persons with disabilities, were being developed in partnership with businesses.

52. While some societies might be anxious about the effects of technological change in terms of job displacement, cyberthreats and social upheaval, history showed that the challenges of technology could be turned into opportunities.

53. **Ms. Subhimaros** (Thailand) said that ICT policies for sustainable development must always take into account the need to promote equality and inclusiveness. Thailand attached great importance to ICTs as a means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Challenges remained in bridging the digital divide. ICTs must continue to be

used in order to increase opportunities for people with limited means, including rural residents.

54. Her Government had implemented a Thailand 4.0 policy as an economic model, focusing not only on technology and innovation, but also on developing people's capacity to keep pace with the changing world. To ensure inclusiveness and affordable access to digital infrastructure, Thailand was expediting the nationwide expansion of its high-speed broadband system, extending access in rural areas through its village broadband initiative the Net Pracharath programme with a view to covering all villages throughout its territory by the end of 2018.

55. To promote even greater transparency and effectiveness through the use of digital technology in many of its operations, her Government was transitioning towards e-government. In addition, the country's eHealth Strategy connected health-related services and data backup management to hospitals nationwide. Her Government continued to support digital literacy and e-commerce through community centres that empowered women economically by means of capacity-building and skill training, providing them with jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities.

56. As part of its smart cities initiative, Thailand was endeavouring to integrate digital technology, energy and transport to improve residents' quality of life. It aimed to develop 100 smart cities within the next two decades, and efforts were already underway in three pilot cities. A national cybersecurity agency was being established for prevention of and protection from cybersecurity threats.

57. Greater cooperation was needed to tackle the challenge of cybercrime and mitigate related risks. The Organization's role in leveraging partnerships between countries and stakeholders in that area was crucial. As the host country for the ITU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and a council member for 2015–2016, Thailand stood ready to continue to promote ICTs for sustainable development in the country, region and beyond.

58. **Mr. Al-Kuwari** (Qatar) said that science and innovation should be harnessed to benefit all classes of society. His country viewed ICTs as essential to development. The Qatar Science and Technology Park established by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development was an incubator for innovative technology projects. The Mada Assistive Technology Center made technology accessible to persons with disabilities.

59. Cybercrime and electronic piracy had the potential to undermine trust in Internet services. The Doha Declaration on Integrating Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice into the Wider United Nations Agenda adopted by the thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice held in Qatar in 2015 had stressed the importance of cybersecurity measures. His country was preparing to host an international cybersecurity conference in 2019. Qatar itself had been the victim of electronic piracy designed to tarnish its reputation with false allegations to be used as a pretext for the imposition of illegal unilateral measures.

60. **Mr. Kadiri** (Nigeria) said that it was imperative to bridge the digital divide and provide universal and cost-effective access to technology. ICTs could provide information and services to previously underserved populations and increase productivity and innovation. Capacity-building for the productive use of ICTs needed to be given due consideration in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

61. His Government had launched a national ICT road map covering the 2017–2020 period which aimed to create 2.5 million jobs through ICTs and expand broadband penetration to all parts of Nigeria, with a 30 per cent penetration level by 2020. The ICT road map was designed to assist in harnessing the skills of young people and afford them opportunities and to enhance business and service delivery through e-commerce and e-government initiatives.

62. His delegation recognized ICTs as critical enablers of economic development and investment, with consequential benefits for employment and social welfare. Nigeria was promoting the development and use of ICTs in all spheres of national life by creating digital content and domestic software applications and through digital delivery of private and public services. The ICT sector was the fourth-largest in the country and had grown to account for 9.8 per cent of the gross domestic product. The use of ICTs in Nigeria was promoting transparent governance and cost-effective delivery of public services.

63. The digital divide must be breached through joint efforts by all stakeholders to promote a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society. His delegation called on Member States and the United Nations to ensure that the benefits of ICTs, including new technologies, were accessible to all. Furthermore, Member States and the United Nations must demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring the return of stolen assets to their countries of origin through the use of ICTs to reduce recovery costs.

64. **Mr. Momen** (Bangladesh) said that his country utilized ICTs as effective tools for advancing its development. Over the current decade, it was focusing on building “Digital Bangladesh” and transforming its economy to bring qualitative change into peoples’ lives. An extensive IT infrastructure covered the entire country, and the Internet density rate was growing. Education, health, agriculture and social services were now being delivered online. Widespread introduction of Internet-based public service delivery had led to increased job creation at the grassroots level, improved the quality of services and reduced corruption and malpractice, thus contributing to good governance.

65. To boost its rural economy, Bangladesh had prioritized the ICT sector in its seventh five-year plan, significantly reducing the costs of trading with the urban economy, as well as bringing farms closer to growth centres and financial services closer to the rural population through Internet-based services. Facilitated access to financial services for women and rural residents had improved their economic condition and reduced inequality. The central bank of Bangladesh had played a pivotal role by introducing mobile financial services. Given its vast marine resources, Bangladesh was also exploring the use of ICTs to ensure the growth of the blue economy.

66. Bangladesh had continued to develop software capabilities by establishing ICT parks, and offered public research grants and tax incentives to encourage private investment in software development. As a climate-vulnerable and disaster-prone country, it was committed to utilizing ICTs not only to enhance its resilience, but also to ensure green growth and decarbonized industrialization. In May 2018, Bangladesh had successfully launched its first satellite, *Bangabandu-1*, a feat it hoped would make its people more risk-informed and resilient.

67. The risks from cyberattacks and misuse of ICTs could be serious for international peace, security and development. His country was working on building a complete cybersecurity ecosystem, taking such steps as enacting a Digital Security Act, establishing a Cyber Security Incident Response Team that cooperated with other countries and setting up a digital forensic laboratory for training purposes. A National Cyber Security Agency was also being established.

68. In view of the risk that the technological gap could result in greater inequalities within and among countries, international cooperation was essential to address developing countries’ challenges to accessing new technologies, bridge the digital divide and prevent and combat the use of ICTs for criminal purposes. The

digital economy was an important component of the global economy, and the assistance of development partners was necessary to develop international trade capacities. The Organization, too, could play a critical role in making the digital world safer by continuing to work on setting norms in information security.

69. **Mr. Al-Ghaffli** (United Arab Emirates) said that his Government had launched a smart-government portal as part of its drive to offer the highest quality services in accordance with its Vision 2021 plan. It had appointed a Minister of Future Foresight, a Minister of Artificial Intelligence and a Minister of Advanced Sciences. In 2021, in the first Arab space mission of its kind, his country would be sending a probe to explore the planet Mars.

70. Just one week earlier, as part of the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives, the United Arab Emirates had launched the *madrassa.org* website, a digital learning platform that offered science and mathematics content in Arabic. His country's Minister of Future Foresight had been chosen to serve on the Secretary-General's recently established High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation. In October 2018, the United Arab Emirates would be hosting the second United Nations World Data Forum, which would explore how data could be harnessed to support the Sustainable Development Goals.

71. **Mr. Khan** (Pakistan) said that, while frontier technologies held great promise, there were concerns that technological innovation would lead to increased unemployment, suppressed wages and greater inequality. The appropriate policy mix and institutional arrangements could ensure that the benefits of innovation were broadly shared. Effective and sustainable technical assistance and capacity-building tailored to developing countries' specific needs and constraints were also needed. Pakistan attached great importance to the full and effective implementation of the outcomes of both the Geneva and Tunis phases of WSIS, including provisions on internet governance and enhanced cooperation. Governments and the United Nations should create a regulatory and legal framework to facilitate the diffusion and transfer of new technologies, while helping address their negative consequences.

72. In recent years, his country's telecommunication sector had undergone rapid growth, particularly in the mobile segment, and the use of broadband for home and business purposes was continuously on the rise. Pakistan had established a telecommunication authority in 1996 with a view to creating a fair regulatory regime to promote investment, encourage competition, protect

consumer interests and ensure high quality ICT services. Its Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology acted as the focal point for planning, coordinating and directing efforts to initiate and launch information technology and telecommunications programmes and projects aimed at the country's economic development. Pakistan had also established software technology parks in several educational and industrial hubs. The e-Government Directorate of Pakistan, established in 2002, had initiated several projects, including online service delivery and enhanced coordination among various government offices and entities.

73. **Ms. El Hilali** (Morocco) said that science, technology and innovation were critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Morocco was committed to overcoming the digital divide that affected developing countries and, particularly, African countries, by means of both national and regional efforts and, particularly, by strengthening South-South cooperation. In that regard, Morocco welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative to organize a High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation and supported his efforts to organize regional consultations, including on the African continent, in 2019.

74. In 2017, Morocco had established the Digital Development Agency, which was responsible for monitoring the implementation of the digital strategy. The digitalization process was an important vehicle for job creation and service improvement, and was aided by increased accessibility and affordability of the Internet and mobile telephone services in urban and rural communities. Morocco had achieved significant technological progress in online financial flows and administrative services, and there had been a surge in the development of online banking. With regard to e-government, Morocco was continuing to improve its digital platforms with the aim of radically transforming administrative processes.

75. Morocco was doubling the number of trained digital professionals every year, which would allow it to reach a total of 30,000 by 2020. Bringing the university and digital worlds together and implementing accessible and free training was also a priority, as well as investment in research, training and innovation.

76. Morocco was striving to increase exchanges with fellow African countries in ICT-related sectors. To that end, several agreements had been signed in Abidjan between Maroc Export, the Cocody municipality, the Moroccan Federation of Information Technology and various Moroccan bank groups. Morocco and Gabon had signed a cooperation agreement on ICT training,

whereby Morocco would annually certify 5,000 Gabonese professionals. Several Moroccan and Egyptian companies had participated in the Jusoor Maroc-Egypte conference in Casablanca. All those efforts were aimed at fostering investment and partnership opportunities between Morocco and its fellow African States.

77. Given that they represented 95 per cent of the Moroccan economy, small and medium-sized companies needed to be made aware of the importance of digitalizing their operations. Internet access, digital literacy campaigns and online services were among the key factors that would allow small and medium-sized companies and youth to be better integrated in the new digital economic era.

78. **Mr. Gayito** (Ethiopia) said that while ICTs could play an important role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, African and developing countries in particular remained less connected than developed countries. Much remained to be done to meet the 2030 Agenda's commitment to leave no one behind. Furthermore, while ICTs could increase productivity, reduce production costs and create jobs, they could also be disruptive and create new challenges for societies and policymakers. It was vital to adopt appropriate and coordinated policy measures at all levels to maximize the benefits and address the challenges of ICTs.

79. National ICT policies and strategies aligned with national development plans were indispensable to harnessing the benefits of ICTs for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations and other development partners should support Member States in effectively implementing ICT policies. A multilateral partnership was also required to address the digital divide and mobilize resources for funding ICT infrastructure, as well as research and development programmes. It was also critical to build research capacity and create capabilities to exploit new technologies. In that regard, it was imperative to promote quality education and equip youth and the labour force with the appropriate skills. Furthermore, the transfer of appropriate technologies to developing countries based on their national priorities required that developed countries fulfil their commitments under the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.

80. Recognizing the enabling role of ICTs in eradicating poverty, his Government had been implementing an ICT policy and strategy in close collaboration with the private sector and other stakeholders. It had been harnessing the development

potential of ICTs in such priority sectors as agriculture, health, education and service delivery and was also building infrastructure to improve access to and the quality of ICT-related services. Despite his country's modest progress, more remained to be done to fully harness the benefits of ICTs. His Government remained committed to building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society.

81. **Mr. Mackay** (Belarus) said that, in the modern world, digital technologies made it possible to create completely new models of production, logistics, trade and business, and to transform spheres such as State governance, economics, health, education and personal communications; they entailed both enormous advantages and significant challenges that must be resolved by collective and mutually beneficial global efforts. The main challenge in the area of ICTs still lay in the need to overcome the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

82. At the national level, Belarus accorded priority to harnessing the potential of digital technologies for the purposes of sustainable development. The current priority was to establish a fully-fledged digital economy. A law adopted in 2017 introduced progressive regulation of advanced technologies, which facilitated the development of IT companies and capital investment, eliminated barriers for implementing the most advanced technologies and created a foundation for an innovative ecosystem. In essence, conditions had been created to gradually transform the country into a regional digital economy leader. High-Tech Park, a platform for promoting digitalisation, was being successfully developed in Belarus and was already the largest IT cluster in eastern Europe. National achievements in the field of advanced technology were recognized at the international level. Belarus had taken first place among Commonwealth of Independent States countries in the ITU ICT development ranking.

83. His Government also attached great importance to regional cooperation. Along with its partners, it was actively working to incorporate the digital agenda of the Eurasian Economic Union. In May 2018, the first Eurasian digital forum had been held in Minsk.

84. At the global level, digital transformation could provide powerful impetus to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations should intensify its efforts to assist States in that regard, including through increased technical and expert assistance. ICT issues should be considered as part of the broader issue of access to energy, industrial, agricultural and other technologies as a means of achieving sustainable development.

85. **Mr. Andambi** (Kenya) said that since ICT connectivity and usage levels were higher in developed than developing countries, more needed to be done in the spirit of leaving no one behind. As had been recognized in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda, technology was an important non-financial means of implementation. Access to information was crucial for socioeconomic development, including the efficient delivery of public services; if deployed effectively and equitably, ICTs could empower both people and Governments. Kenya welcomed the annual multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals.

86. As core enabling tools, ICTs were key to economic growth. Considering that future societies would be knowledge-based, those that succeeded would be the ones that effectively leveraged relevant information in decision-making. Kenya was unequivocally committed to creating a knowledge-based nation. It was convinced that, by pursuing a systematic approach to harnessing ICTs, it would spur economic growth through job creation and enhancement of service delivery.

87. His Government had a detailed National ICT Master Plan that addressed areas pertaining to laws, regulations and policies, as well as infrastructure and human capital development. It identified roles for both the public and private sectors in attaining the anticipated targets, acknowledging that neither the Government nor the private sector could reach the objectives alone.

88. His Government's vision was for Kenya to become a regional ICT hub and transition into a globally competitive digital economy based on partnership, equity and non-discrimination, technology neutrality, environmental protection and conservation, good governance and incentivizing. Kenya recognized the importance of human capital and workforce development and had significantly invested in ICT education by building institutions of learning.

89. Each of Kenya's 47 counties was connected to fibre optic technology, which had tremendously improved service delivery and not only eased access to information, but also increased the number of Internet users at reduced cost. Kenya was implementing many ICT programmes, including Technology Cities, youth training for online jobs, expanding the M-PESA payment system into other banking services and expanding e-government. ICTs had drastically simplified the process of registering, setting up and, subsequently, doing business in Kenya.

90. **Ms. Chanda** (Zambia) said that the impediments faced by developing countries in accessing innovative

technologies had significantly contributed to the digital divide between developed and developing countries, particularly least developed countries. The international community must pool its efforts and prioritize bridging the digital divide between and within countries, between women and men and between boys and girls. While none of the Goals pertained to ICTs per se, several targets made reference to them, and the 2030 Agenda also recognized their immense potential to accelerate human progress, bridge the digital divide and develop knowledge societies.

91. Although ICTs were a catalyst for socioeconomic development, challenges related to their accessibility and utilization had yet to be fully addressed. Both public and private ICT infrastructure was still inadequate and fragmented, resulting in insufficient connectivity. Henceforth, Zambia would focus on strengthening the legal framework for ICTs and providing infrastructure for service delivery and electronic services, as set out in its seventh national development plan, in order to promote access to ICT technologies, e-commerce, and the networking of services and applications throughout the public sector.

92. Her country had commenced phase II of the Communications Towers Project, under which 318 out of 1,009 communication towers had been erected. The increased network coverage provided by those towers promoted broader public use of electronic platforms and enhanced efficiency in business and Government transactions. Once finalized, the project was expected to improve coverage from 84 to 95 per cent.

93. Progress had been made in the launch of the digital migration programme, under which 55 of 63 digital transmission sites had been commissioned, resulting in improved access to digital television services throughout Zambia. A review of the licensing framework had been undertaken to remove entry barriers and allow for competition, thus paving the way for new mobile network operators. Her Government had also begun unbundling the Electronic Communications and Transactions Act No. 21 of 2009 into three laws on cybersecurity, data protection and e-commerce. As a result of all the efforts made, there had been significant growth in the ICT sub-sector, the mobile subscriber base and the rate of Internet users.

94. Access to information was as much a human right as the right to safe and clean water or affordable health care. Her country reaffirmed its commitment to accelerating human progress, bridging the digital divide, developing knowledge societies and bringing information to people. Zambia called on the international community, including the private sector, to

partner with it and ensure that information was accessible to all and not just the privilege of the few.

95. **Mr. Bilan** (Ukraine) said that technical cooperation and the diffusion of innovations and new technologies had the potential to bridge gaps in sustainable development. His Government's measures to promote ICTs, including preferential taxation, had led to 20 per cent growth in that sector over the previous year. While encouraging cooperation between Government, business, public organizations and society, Ukraine was focusing on six priority areas: electronic communications and infrastructure, trust and security, e-trade, digital skills, ICT innovation, start-up ecosystems and e-health. Ukraine had had great success in using technological innovations to improve the State's interactions with citizens and businesses and modernize public services. In recent years, new technologies had been used in the public sector for implementing an electronic procurement system, creating an electronic system for income declaration, setting up public access to State property registers, and developing a mechanism for electronic appeals and petitions. In early 2018, the Ukrainian Cabinet had approved the Concept for the Development of Digital Economy and Society in Ukraine for 2018–2020, which would facilitate the transition to a high-quality, high-tech economy.

96. The introduction of modern technologies brought new threats; his delegation urged Member States to devote more attention to cybersecurity, both at the national and global levels, including within the framework of the United Nations.

97. **Mr. Djani** (Indonesia) said that while digital technology played a crucial role in economic development, half of the world's population was still not online. Fair distribution of the benefits of the fourth industrial revolution would mean bridging the digital divide, both between and within countries. In that regard, his delegation commended the Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies and his establishment of a High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation.

98. Digital inclusion would require an enabling environment to maximize the benefits of ICTs for development, and cooperation among Governments and relevant stakeholders. In particular, efforts would have to be made to bring ICTs to rural and remote areas. Financing would be needed to build infrastructure, improve digital access and encourage start-ups. Digital skills and literacy should be a priority, including for youth, women and girls, older persons and professionals. Steps should also be taken to mitigate

technology-related job loss and to address cybersecurity threats. The United Nations should develop specific recommendations to address the risks associated with ICTs and rapid technological development.

99. **Mr. Al-Hamar** (Bahrain) said that in 2017, for the fourth year running, Bahrain had ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa region in the ICT Development Index published by ITU. Bahrain had been trying to diversify its economy in the wake of the decline in oil prices. Its Vision 2030 plan had laid out the country's digital future. One step Bahrain had taken to promote ICTs was to allow 100 per cent foreign ownership of businesses. Its Cloud First policy encouraged Government agencies to use online platforms for data storage. In 2017, the Amazon Web Services company had announced that it had selected Bahrain as the site of its first regional cloud data centre in the Middle East. His country would also be hosting such international events as Bahrain Technology Week and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Enterprise Forum.

100. **Ms. Seng** (Myanmar) said that the fourth industrial revolution was transforming economies and societies. The international community needed to seize the opportunities offered by ICTs and minimize the potential risks.

101. Myanmar had enacted a telecommunications law in 2013. The price of a subscriber identification module (SIM) card had plummeted from 1,500 dollars to less than one dollar, while mobile telephone coverage had skyrocketed. Her Government's 2016 economic policy prioritized the ICT sector; it had put in place a digital communications strategy, an e-government system and a data identity card system. It was striving to utilize ICTs to reduce poverty and inequality, advance human capacity and develop a knowledge-based society, and was providing e-health options, digital learning and online financial services, among other options. It was also endeavouring to improve digital infrastructure, in cooperation with development partners and investors, to achieve greater financial inclusion. An e-government steering committee and a digital economy development committee had been established, and a digital economy development plan had been drafted, covering such areas as agriculture, tourism and small and medium-sized enterprises.

102. The international community needed to be mindful of the threats that accompanied ICT progress. Her Government was drafting a cybercrime and electronic evidence act. Myanmar was committed to the development of policy and regulatory frameworks to ensure accessibility and affordability of ICT services

and welcomed the operationalization of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries. Infrastructure, digital literacy, capacity-building, investment, appropriate financing and international multi-stakeholder cooperation would all be needed to bridge the digital divide and provide universal and affordable access to the Internet so as to accelerate efforts for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

103. **Mr. Gough** (Brazil) said that technology was a cross-cutting element of the 2030 Agenda and a crucial means of implementation of its goals and targets that could promote social inclusion, economic growth and environmentally friendly solutions. It was unfortunate that access to ICTs was still limited, the pace of technology transfer was falling short, and the digital divide was increasing both between and within countries. International collaboration must be strengthened and multi-stakeholder partnerships established to implement effective policies, invigorate existing multilateral mechanisms such as CSTD and the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, and renew the commitments stemming from the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Fostering national capacity development was of critical importance and must be country-driven, address specific needs and reflect national sustainable development strategies, with priority given to women, children and older persons.

104. His country had been modernizing its domestic ICT legislation, and had put in place a legal framework on science, technology and innovation for the purpose of building bridges between the private sector and scientific institutions. March 2018 had seen the launch of the Brazilian Strategy for Digital Transformation, that streamlined public policies specifically focused on new technologies, and in August 2018, Brazil's President had signed a new General Data Protection Law. ICTs involved complex issues that touched upon employment, regulation, taxation, privacy and ethics. Those issues should be addressed at multilateral forums within existing United Nations initiatives, with the engagement of all countries and an emphasis on dialogue with developing countries; efforts should be made to reinforce existing mechanisms of the United Nations, while avoiding duplication of efforts. The establishment of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries had been a positive step.

105. **Mr. Jauwan** (Saudi Arabia) said that the international community needed to be aware of both the positive and the negative effects of ICTs. Familiarity with technology was now a requirement for young people seeking jobs. An ICT deficit had negative impacts on a country's employment rate and standard of living. He called on the United Nations and the

international community to step up efforts to ensure that the right of access to modern ICTs could be enjoyed by all. His country was working to bring the benefits of ICTs to all its people. Internet access was being disseminated to all corners of the Kingdom. His country's Vision 2030 plan aimed to use ICTs to increase productivity and competitiveness in all sectors of Government and business.

106. His Government shared concerns about cybersecurity, and had established a National Cybersecurity Authority and a Saudi Federation for Cyber Security and Programming. He was proud to note that the 2018 Hajj Hackathon had made it into the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest ever. Saudi Arabia stood ready to engage in international cooperation to combat exploitation of children via the Internet and other abuses.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.