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Statement

by

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Executive Secretary

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at

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Official Opening Segment**

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Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you to our good colleagues ITU and UNESCO for their leadership in organizing this summit.

It is an honour and a pleasure to be with you today, and express the support of the UN Regional Commissions to this important Forum.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda sets out an ambitious path for transformation. And digital technologies and the agenda driven and discussed here today at the World Summit on the Information Society can help us on this achieve this transformation. I am here to offer our strong partnership. In the Regional Commissions, under ESCWA's coordination, we will do our best to use information and communication technologies (ICTs), to strengthen the knowledge and information societies and advance sustainable development.

There is so much to gain.

ICTs can help us overcome the constraints of geography, enabling new forms of national and international collaboration that would not be feasible otherwise. They are bringing us together. New modes of organizing production, of delivering services, of reaching out to far away markets can become reality – and these possibilities are particularly relevant for SMEs, for landlocked countries... ICTs are hugely beneficial to the economies of those who are at a disadvantage due to distance and unequal access to knowledge. ICTs can allow countries and communities to leap-frog in their development struggle.

We live in a connected world and we see new fascinating markets and products where physical products and digital technologies merge and move together. Integration cannot be measured any more only by commercial or financial flows. The intensity of data exchanges is increasingly becoming an important indicator of economic integration.

Access to information and participation in global knowledge networks are not possible without a well-developed digital infrastructure. This is increasingly the backbone of our societies. The value of infrastructure is no longer defined only by the physical aspects of power networks, bridges, roads... Digital technologies enhance the connectivity and efficiency provided by physical infrastructure, thereby adding value along the entire value chain.

ICTs are at the heart of innovations in multiple areas - from automated driving and intelligent transport systems to smart power grids; from environmental management systems to the efficiency gains associated to smart cities. And in all areas strong legal frameworks and standards are absolutely necessary to deploy and utilize ICTs efficiently. We need trust, predictability and common standards.

UNECE is heavily engaged in this area.

In the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and E-Business (UN/CEFACT) hosted by UNECE, we develop standards and recommendations for trade facilitation and e-commerce that bring together stakeholders, lead to a common understanding, and facilitate exchange across borders and bridges.

Our Inland Transport Committee has extensive work on intelligent transport and develops the vehicle regulations for the fascinating new vehicles. On smart cities, meanwhile, we have teamed up with ITU and developed a set of smart sustainable city indicators. These will allow cities to measure how “smart” they are in a variety of areas, and can inform urban development plans and strategies.

ICTs allow us to do more and, most often, to do it faster and cheaper.

However, the implications of digital technologies and the knowledge society do not stop at innovation, resource efficiency, collaboration and management. They are also an empowering tool for personal development. They help build transparent and open societies, and provide

new channels for accountability. Our Aarhus Convention gives citizens the right to access to information. Digital technologies can help governments deliver this information to their citizens, paving the way for accountability and political progress.

A key objective of the 2030 Agenda is “nobody is left behind”. Digital technologies can ensure this, and help us build inclusive societies. This requires inclusive policies that pay attention to the needs of different groups. Which in turn require data that are sufficiently disaggregated so that we can understand the situation well. The UN Regional Commissions are committed to helping their member States build capacity to better disaggregate their official statistics and monitor the implementation of inclusive policies. We are also developing tools and recommendations to ensure that data, big data and new sources of data provided by modern technology can be incorporated into statistical methodologies. This can help us to react faster and better.

However, despite rapid progress, there is still much to do. More than half of the world’s population is not using the Internet. Therefore, it is not possible yet to speak of a global information society. Wide regional and country differences persist and these need to be tackled.

The UN Regional Commissions are ready to work - together and with other stakeholders and all you here in the room - to further advance the construction of an information society while contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Thank you.
