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REPORT ON THE WSIS+10 REVIEW PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

SUMMARY

This report highlights the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+10) Review by the United Nations General Assembly.

I. Background

1. The 10-year overall review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+10) highlighted achievements and remaining challenges in promoting Information and Communication Technologies for maximum inclusive and sustainable development. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) concluded this process with the adoption by consensus of the outcome document (A/70/L.33)¹ in December 2015. UNESCO's themes and approaches figure prominently in the UNGA adopted resolution.
2. The WSIS+10 Review process was launched with the first WSIS+10 Review Event that was hosted by UNESCO in 2013. Its Final Statement was agreed in an inclusive multistakeholder process and subsequently endorsed by the General Conference.² Both the UNESCO WSIS+10 Event and its Final Statement were explicitly recognized by the UNGA as important inputs for its WSIS+10 resolution.
3. The 2013 WSIS+10 Review Event was complemented by the ITU-hosted WSIS+10 Review Meeting in 2014. In Geneva, the final agreement on the multistakeholder negotiated texts was achieved with the direct facilitation by UNESCO's Deputy Director-General.
4. UNESCO contributed substantially to the WSIS+10 review report by the Commission for Science, Technology and Development (CSTD), which was the final preparatory step for the overall WSIS+10 Review by the UNGA in December 2015. The Outcome Statement of UNESCO's CONNECTing The Dots Conference in 2015, endorsed at the 38th General Conference (38 C/Res.56), was submitted as an input to the WSIS Review process.

II. UNGA WSIS+10 Review Outcomes

5. Member States, informed by multistakeholder consultations and with the facilitation by UNDESA, UNESCO, ITU and UNCTAD, agreed on UNGA resolution A/70/L.33 in December 2015. This resolution confirms the initial WSIS vision of a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge".
6. Member States call for a close alignment between the World Summit on the Information Society process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, highlighting the cross-cutting contribution of ICT to achieving the sustainable development goals and eradicating poverty.
7. In reference to UNESCO's objective of building knowledge societies, the UNGA notes "the ambition to move beyond 'information societies' to 'knowledge societies', in which information is not only created and disseminated, but put to the benefit of human development".
8. Member States also reaffirm that "digital and knowledge divides" remain important in today's world. In terms of connectivity, 80% of the developed country households have Internet access, but two thirds of the population residing in developing countries remain offline. Beyond infrastructure access, the digital and knowledge divides reflect other inequalities, for example in terms of education and income, between and within countries, as well as between women and men.
9. As advocated by UNESCO, the UNGA resolution calls for steps to bridge the digital and knowledge divides, to address the "gender digital divide" and to "mainstream gender in the WSIS process". Other examples of topics, which were advocated for by UNESCO and included in the final resolution, are the strengthening of the enabling policy environments and international cooperation to improve affordability, access, education, science, capacity-building, multilingualism,

¹ The draft resolution of the 70th UNGA, agenda item 17, was adopted without amendment by consensus and is available in six languages here:

<http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/70/L.33>.

² Resolution 51 adopted by the General Conference at its 37th session.

cultural preservation and expression, media and information literacy, access to local content and by persons with disabilities, as well as comprehensive, practical digital strategies for the preservation of cultural heritage and access to recorded information.

10. The “Human Rights in the Information Society” chapter recognizes that human rights have been central to the WSIS vision and reaffirms former commitments, including that the same rights that people have offline must be protected online. The UNGA recognises that ICTs have shown their potential to strengthen the exercise of human rights, enabling access to information, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association. It also notes with concern that there are “serious threats to freedom of expression and plurality of information” and calls “for the protection of journalists, media workers and civil society space”. Member States are also called upon to take measures to ensure there is not “arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy”.

11. On Internet-related issues, the UNGA reaffirmed that Internet governance should continue to follow the provisions set forth in the outcomes of Tunis and Geneva. Paralleling UNESCO’s Internet Universality concept and associated ROAM (Rights-based, open, accessible, multistakeholder) principles, the UNGA emphasized that the Internet includes “multilateral, transparent, democratic and multistakeholder processes” and that progress towards the WSIS vision has also to be considered as “a function of progress with respect to the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms”. The role of the UNESCO facilitated WSIS Action Line 10 on the Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society was reiterated, including for “strengthening the role of ICTs as enablers of development”, which is also linked to the priorities of the Information for All Programme (IFAP).

12. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was prolonged for another 10 years. As different views relative to the progress on the implementation of enhanced cooperation remained, the CSTD was invited to establish a Working Group through the ECOSOC to develop related recommendations for further implementation.

III. Conclusion

13. Ten years of active WSIS implementation built global awareness about the potential of ICTs for development. The review also showed how information and knowledge societies have changed since 2003 as well as how few of the changes were predicted at the time of the Summit. The capabilities of ICT networks and services today are some 30 times more than what they were at the times of WSIS.³ Furthermore, the forces helping to shape contemporary societies today – such as mobile broadband, smartphones, social media, cloud computing – were not on the initial WSIS agenda.

14. Beyond technological changes, ICTs have altered the underlying parameters of societies, cultures and economies, as well as government-citizen relationships, and social relations altogether. The underlying impact, including wider socio-economic and cultural transformations, are recognized as more important than individual technologies. These changes vary substantially within and between countries and regions, and it is highly likely that they will accelerate with the Internet of Things, algorithmic decision-making and artificial intelligence in the future.

15. Acknowledging that it will take time to address some of the existing challenges and to make good use of evolving technologies for development, the UNGA decided to hold a high-level meeting to review the implementation of WSIS outcomes in 2025, with the inputs and participation of all stakeholders.

16. The UNGA called particularly on the United Nations entities that are facilitating WSIS Action Lines, within their mandate and existing resources, to continue working together to regularly analyse the nature of digital divides, study strategies to bridge them and make their findings available to the international community.

³ CSTD Report 2015, Implementing WSIS Outcomes: A ten-year review, UNCTAD 2015, p. 3.

17. Further to its outstanding role in shaping the overall WSIS+10 Review process and its outcomes, and taking into account the importance of building knowledge societies through the implementation of the WSIS+10 outcomes, UNESCO will continue, within its medium-term strategy (C/4) and its programme and budget (C/5), to play a lead-facilitating WSIS role, together with ITU, UNDP and UNCTAD, and to carry on with facilitation of the six UNESCO-led WSIS Action Lines and with the UNESCO-wide implementation of the WSIS outcomes. In partnership with UNESCO, Member States and other relevant WSIS stakeholders will continue to have an important role to play in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes.