Fifth Internet Governance Forum
Vilnius, Lithuania

Opening Ceremony

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Distinguished President Grybauskaite of Lithuania

Distinguished Mr Eligijus Masiulis, Minister of Transport and Communications, Lithuania

Mr Sudaram, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to address the fifth edition of the Internet Governance Forum on behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

First let me thank our hosts, the Lithuanian Government, for their hospitality and the excellent facilities they have provided us.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group and the Secretariat of the IGF for their excellent preparations for the Forum.

UNESCO has been an ardent supporter of, and contributor to, the IGF, which we have always seen as an essential platform for multi-stakeholder discussions. The Forum provides an important channel for exchanges of opinions, ideas, and concerns. It provides us all with inspiration and ideas for our work to improve Internet governance.

UNESCO's interest in the IGF stems from our conviction that the Internet has a key role to play in fostering pluralistic and equitable knowledge societies.

To support the development of inclusive knowledge societies, the Internet must be governed in a way that provides each and everyone not only with access to the Internet, but also with access to quality content.

Let's look back 5 years. ICANN was reporting to the US Government under the the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding. During the IGF in Athens, the community began discussing the management of resources for the internet. A year later the Memorandum of Understanding was replaced by a Joint Project Agreement and three years later by the Affirmation of Commitments.

I have no doubt that the heated debates of the IGF meetings contributed significantly to gradual evolutions in the oversight mechanisms of the technical coordinator of the Domain Name Systems.

During the WSIS preparatory process and the first IGFs, calls for the internationalization of Domain Names were very persistent. I remember Ms. Manal Ismail from Egypt informing us about the work of the Arab States on language tables for Arab script based languages.

Today International Domain Names are a reality, not only for the Arab states, but for dozens of other countries as well. UNESCO has always advocated linguistic diversity on the Internet.

It is not acceptable that as recently as 2008 only 12 languages accounted for 98% of all webpages on the Internet, considering that people on our planet speak approximately 6000 languages.

English is clearly the dominant language of the web and was two years ago used on 72% of all webpages; however, speakers of other languages also need to be able to express themselves on the internet.

To help achieve this, UNESCO signed a cooperation agreement with ICANN late last year, providing for cooperation in promoting multilingualism on the Internet.

We will return to this topic in more depth during UNESCO's Open Forum session on Thursday, when we will present the report: "Twelve years measuring linguistic diversity in the Internet: balance and perspectives".

But let me say that during this session of the Forum UNESCO hopes to move to the stage of practical cooperation in promoting multilingualism on the internet.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In recent months, UNESCO has grown increasingly concerned about growing efforts in some parts of the world to limit freedom of expression on the Internet.

This is not acceptable for our organization whose constitutional goal is to promote the free flow of information by word and image.

Freedom of expression is central to building strong democracies, contributing to good governance, promoting civic participation and the rule of law. It is also essential for human development and security.

The principle of freedom of expression, as stated in Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, must apply to the Internet, just as it should to traditional media.

Therefore, during this edition of the IGF, UNESCO will continue engaging with all stakeholders to address this issue, advocating for the free and unfettered flow of information.

Before closing, I would like to to emphasize our great responsibility to respect the interests and fulfill the aspirations of the billions of people who have yet to connect to the Internet.

Therefore let me reiterate UNESCO's commitment to the IGF and its multi-stakeholder approach. Less than a year ago, UNESCO's 193 Member States adopted a decision to strengthen UNESCO's involvement in the field of Internet Governance. UNESCO shares the enthusiasm of IGF participants to increase multi-stakeholder participation in, and understanding of, the Internet. Our ultimate goal is to create conditions in which the Internet will provide development opportunities for all.

I wish all participants fruitful deliberations and look forward to engaging with you in the coming days.

Thank you.