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Opening Ceremony

Statement submitted by

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Opening remarks by Malcolm Johnson, ITU Deputy Secretary-General

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Mr. Chairman. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen good morning.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you today about the progress made in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and to reiterate the need for close alignment between the WSIS process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

During your deliberations, you will have the opportunity to review ITU's contribution to the Implementation of the WSIS Outcomes during 2018. In our report, we have underscored the direct links between the WSIS outcomes and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and our SDG Mapping Tool relates all ITU activities to the SDGs and the WSIS Action Lines.

This year, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the WSIS Forum. There were a lot of firsts during the weeklong forum. For example, we devoted an entire day to persons with disabilities. We also launched an SDG Digital Investment Framework. We hope it will start a different kind of dialogue with the investment community – a dialogue that encourages a whole-of-government approach and helps governments choose effective and scalable technology-based solutions with maximum return on investment.

Over the last ten years the WSIS Forum has developed as the leading multistakeholder ICT for development event in the world. More than 3,000 participants from over 150 countries came to Geneva with one goal in mind: leveraging information and communication technologies (ICTs) to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. We heard from some of the most important voices in government, the private sector, academia, civil society and a variety of regional and international organisations. It was interesting to note that each of these 5 main stakeholder groups contributed approximately equally – a truly multistakeholder event. The WSIS Stocktaking Database and the WSIS Prizes show what this multistakeholder effort can achieve on the ground in practical terms.

As the UN specialized agency for ICTs, it is right that ITU plays an important role in the facilitation and implementation of the WSIS outcomes and the 2030 Agenda. But we cannot do it alone and I would like to take this opportunity to thank our co-organizers: UNCTAD, UNESCO and UNDP – as well as all the other UN agencies that work closely with ITU in implementing the WSIS Process and running the WSIS Forum. We take pride in seeing increasing numbers of the UN family and the WSIS community working side-by-side to continue exploring how to build more open and inclusive information and knowledge societies.

Just a few months ago, at the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in Dubai, ITU Member States reaffirmed a shared vision of information and knowledge societies where ICTs enable and accelerate social, economic and environmentally sustainable growth and development for everyone. This vision is within reach. ITU's latest statistics show that more than half of the world's population now uses the Internet for the first time in history. This is a moment of opportunity. I hope it inspires us to work together to connect the other half, mainly those living in rural and remote communities, so that everyone everywhere can benefit from the power of technology to improve their lives and livelihoods.

Without this connectivity the 2030 Agenda will not be achieved. That is why it is so important for us to track progress through initiatives like the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. The task

group presented the final draft of a list of ICT indicators during this year's WSIS Forum. It will be finalized next month and will help countries measure their progress in the adoption and use of ICTs in different sectors of the economy.

Progress also requires strengthening collaboration, coordination and cooperation. We need to bring our own specific competencies to the table, pool our resources and avoid duplication of effort. To this end, ITU has submitted the outcomes of the WSIS Forum 2019 to the upcoming High-Level Political Forum in New York. The UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) has also submitted a joint statement to this important event and we hope to hold a side event there illustrating progress and what more needs to be done. Moreover, we expect WSIS to be included in the UN Regional Coordination Mechanisms, making WSIS4SDG one of the pillars of the regional SDG Forums. All these efforts will strengthen the alignment and linkages between the WSIS Process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We are in the midst of a digital revolution, driven by major new technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, blockchain, 5G – and many more. These technologies took front and centre stage at this year's WSIS Forum. They are at the centre of ITU's work and hold great potential for accelerating progress towards the SDGs and delivering on the promise of the digital economy.

The WSIS Action Lines have withstood the test of time. Let us move forward together in our efforts to align the WSIS process with the SDGs, both inside and outside the UN family, so that the expectations envisaged at the Summit in 2003 and 2005 are finally realised.

I wish you all a successful meeting and hope to see all of you for the WSIS Forum 2020 that will take place between 30 March and 3 April. The 2020 WSIS Forum – WSIS+15 - will serve as a platform to track the achievements of WSIS Action Lines in collaboration with the UN Agencies involved and provide information and analyses of the implementation of WSIS Action Lines since 2005.

Thank you.