



H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the 15th annual meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). I would like to thank the Secretary-General for convening this important and topical discussion.

Ladies and gentlemen allow me to be direct: The SDG target of achieving universal connectivity by 2020 has not been met. In fact:

- 3.6 billion people continue to lack access to the internet.
- Only 19 per cent of people in Least Developed Countries have access to the internet, in stark contrast to the 87 per cent in developed countries.
- And the digital divide is exacerbating existing inequalities. In two out of every three countries, more men use the internet than women.

All of this, of course, is only complicated and compounded by COVID-19, which has underscored the depth and gravity of this divide, and which is eroding development gains in countries and communities that are disconnected from the rest of the world.

Deprived from an important means of development and adaptation to this pandemic, these countries and communities are at risk of losing an entire generation's worth of hard-won development gains.



While it can be argued that the Decade of Action and Delivery has been derailed by the pandemic, quite the opposite can in fact be true. We can use this moment and the opportunity afforded by COVID recovery efforts to fast-track progress globally, to invest in a sustainable recovery that is guided by the SDGs. Addressing the digital divide is a significant part of this.

As an SDG accelerator, improved digital access will have dividends across the whole of the SDGs, expanding access to education and employment, and boosting progress in the areas of good governance and gender equality. Likewise, increased connectivity has the potential to boost economic growth, and create new markets in fintech and mobile banking, amongst others.

Another SDG accelerator – and one that is directly linked to increased connectivity – is the need to address unequal access to reliable and renewable energy. With the UN High-Level Dialogue on Energy in September 2021, the Internet Governance Forum provides an opportune moment to explore the interlinkages between these issues and to chart a path forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you go through your deliberations, I ask that you consider these issues and to ask yourselves this: What are the primary challenges impeding implementation at the multilateral, regional and local levels? And what kinds of partnerships on digital issues have been most effective?



Before closing, allow me to say this: we cannot and should not be satisfied to live in a world where half the population is more connected than at any time in history, while the other half is left unplugged and disconnected. Closing the digital divide is both a moral and practical imperative.

I thank you for the opportunity to address the Forum and I wish you the best in your deliberations.

Thank you.