**Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG)
Response to the
CSTD Questionnaire for 20-year review of WSIS implementation**

Survey form link: https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=2zWeD09UYE-9zF6kFubccJBkWcxFirNJnYRppt_fKqNUMTdQRzg5VjdVN0lZWEJDNlVCQkNWSTY2VCQlQCN0PWcu

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7. To what extent, in your experience, has the "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society", envisaged in the opening paragraph of the WSIS Geneva Declaration of Principles, developed within the 20 years since WSIS?

The original vision of the WSIS principles, that of an Information Society "where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge", has met with mixed outcomes - while the technology and its applications have developed in ways that have been of tremendous value (for instance, facilitating the shift for many to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic), there remain digital divides, and there are significant sectors of humanity who are unable to take advantage of the benefits provided by the Internet. The world experienced an Internet spike in 2020, with 466 million people using the Internet for the very first time that year; yet, as of 2022, 2.7 billion people, one third of the world's population, still do not have access to the Internet, and 53% of the world does not have access to high-speed broadband.

For those who are online, the increasingly ubiquitous reach of connected digital technologies into all aspects of life has implications for users' health and human rights, as well as creating a vastly expanded scope for criminal or unethical misuse.

Clearly there remain policy challenges in the Internet governance space that require our ongoing attention and dedication, grounded in the active engagement of the full spectrum of Internet governance stakeholders. Moreover, action in support of an open, universal, and inclusive Internet that is free-flowing and trustworthy, safe and secure, and rights-respecting, is essential for accelerating achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The principles laid out by the WSIS process remain our best hope at addressing these challenges, and a concrete implementation of the WSIS outcomes is the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and its growing network of national and regional IGF initiatives (NRIs), which are independent from the global IGF but act in accordance with the main principles of the global IGF. By engaging on issues related to the broad field of Internet governance (also referred to as digital

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governance or Digital Cooperation) and fostering discussions and partnerships among governments, civil society, the technical community, academia, and the private sector, the ecosystem comprising the UN IGF and the NRIs has catalyzed efforts to ensure that the digital revolution of our societies can be of benefit to all.

The open, inclusive, and multistakeholder approach of the IGF, which was mandated by the WSIS process (and re-affirmed in the 10-year review that took place in 2015) has been an essential and consistent element at the center of United Nations discussions of Internet governance and the information society more generally. However, much has changed in the two decades since the original WSIS discussions, and therefore it has been equally essential that the IGF be able to react, evolve, and improve to meet new challenges and scenarios.

The IGF's evolution, bottom-up and needs-based, has reflected the spirit of "IGF+" envisaged by the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. Specifically, the IGF has introduced a number of improvements during recent years, including the issuance of annual IGF "Messages" (starting with the 2017 IGF held in Geneva); the establishment of a Parliamentary Track (an idea first trialed at the 2011 IGF in Nairobi, and instituted annually since the 2019 IGF in Berlin); the strengthening of intersessional work - Best Practice Fora, Dynamic Coalitions of expert stakeholders, and Policy Networks - and, in 2022, the establishment of the UN IGF Leadership Panel as a connector between the multistakeholder community and decision-makers worldwide. In addition, the IGF is playing a vital role in channeling multistakeholder insights and inputs for the Global Digital Compact, *inter alia* through the IGF Messages from Addis Ababa 2022 and the Kyoto Messages 2023.

The IGF's year-round intersessional initiatives provide numerous concrete examples of the impact achieved by this multistakeholder community institution. For example, over the past 20 years the Internet has become much more accessible to persons with disabilities - by embracing accessibility, inclusivity, and the principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us", the IGF's Dynamic Coalition for Accessibility and Disability (DCAD) has worked to represent the voice of people with disabilities and ensure that in the digital space the rights and dignity of every individual are respected and celebrated.

The worldwide increase in cybersecurity risks and threats since the original WSIS is another major challenge that is being addressed by the Dynamic Coalition on Internet Standards, Security and Safety (IS3C) through its workstreams on security-by-design policy and practice for the Internet of Things, addressing cybersecurity skills gaps in educational curricula, and public procurement as a driver for more extensive and effective deployment of security-related standards.

8. How has the implementation of WSIS outcomes contributed towards the development of a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society"?

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As a concrete implementation of the WSIS outcomes, the IGF ecosystem has contributed significantly to progress towards the WSIS vision and, importantly, towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While there is no specific SDG pertaining to Internet or digital, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have noted that more than two-thirds of the UN's targets for sustainable development can benefit directly from digital technologies. The WSIS vision of a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society" is of cross-cutting importance to our broader goals for human society.

Specific examples of how the IGF has contributed to realizing this vision include the work done by the Best Practice Forum on Gender and Access (2015-2022), which helped to develop best practices for gender inclusiveness and equality (SDG 5); the Policy Network on Meaningful Access and the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability have both made notable contributions to make the Internet more inclusive and accessible (SDG 5 and SDG 10); and the Policy Network on Environment and Digitalisation and the subsequent Dynamic Coalition on Environment have worked to understand and document the important links between digital governance issues and SDG 13 on climate action.

The organic formation of national and regional IGFs (NRIs) demonstrates the value of these intersessional gatherings between the annual IGF meetings. As a border-spanning ecosystem, the evolution of Internet governance is vitally dependent on broad, multistakeholder dialogue afforded by the IGF and NRIs. Legislative and treaty agreements surrounding the use of the Internet must be informed by the diverse perspectives provided by the IGF, its Multistakeholder Advisory Group and Leadership Panel, and the NRIs. As progress is made on the Global Digital Compact (GDC), the IGF will be an essential lens through which the implementation of the Compact's provisions can be evaluated. The prescient creation of the IGF by the 2005 Tunis Agenda provides a means for Member States and their populations to track the impact and utility of terms of the much-anticipated GDC.

9. How much progress do you believe has been made in implementing specific WSIS outcomes?

IGF was a key outcome of the WSIS process, mandated in Paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda as a "new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue" to catalyze the variety of governance discussions that it was clear would need to occur if we were to achieve the WSIS vision. Significant progress has been made in the development and evolution of that forum and its associated activities (including intersessional work and the network of national and regional Internet governance initiatives) since the first IGF in 2006. This progress and the impact of the IGF has been documented extensively in the annual reports provided by the IGF Secretariat to the CSTD

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on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society. These reports are available here: https://intgovforum.org/en/content/cstd-reports-1

In short, the IGF has met annually since 2006 in 16 different countries. The most recent IGF, held in Kyoto, Japan, in October 2023, was attended by 6,279 participants on-site (the highest number of any IGF to date) and approximately 3,000 people online. The total number registered, of which more than two-thirds were first-time attendees, included 1,561 government representatives from 149 countries, and saw a doubling of the previous event's private sector participation. In addition, 35 remote hubs facilitated additional remote participation opportunities, enhancing the global nature of discussions while helping to strengthen local Internet stakeholder communities. And the 2023 meeting saw the continuation of the very well-received Parliamentarian Track - since 2019, around 420 Parliamentarians from 109 countries have taken part in the IGF via this approach.

Moreover, the IGF has evolved beyond an annual event to become a global ecosystem in which intersessional projects, issue-focused groups, national and regional Internet governance initiatives (NRIs), and dedicated conference tracks reinforce each other in building the evidence-based knowledge, insight, understanding, and innovation that are necessary to tackle the challenges of Internet and digital technologies. More than 168 NRIs (including youth-led initiatives around the world) ensure that many Internet stakeholders have the opportunity to participate and contribute, in an inclusive manner, to governance discussions on issues of direct relevance to them.

Year-round multistakeholder activities carried out by the IGF's Policy Networks, Best Practice Fora, and groups of experts collaborating in over 25 IGF Dynamic Coalitions, serve to augment the role of the IGF as a global forum for stakeholders. As open, inclusive, and diverse platforms for cooperation under the aegis of the IGF and focused on specific policy challenges and opportunities, they make an important and concrete contribution to the policy discussions at the IGF through their deep analysis, research reports, and consensus-based practical solutions and policy recommendations. These ongoing intersessional activities provide the IGF with the mechanisms for responding to urgent and often complex policy challenges.

All of this represents significant progress on the project laid out in the Tunis Agenda, focused on the continuous improvement of access and inclusivity (via distributed initiatives and effective use of remote participation strategies) and responsiveness to the changing policy and technology landscape. However, there is still much work to be done both on the accessibility and inclusion front to ensure that all users can gain and experience the benefits of the Internet, and that all can participate in Internet governance discussions on an equal footing.

It is readily apparent that the increasing presence of the Internet and related digital technologies in all aspects of daily life demands increased focus on both the benefits and risks of such technology. The formation of the Leadership Panel (LP) in 2022 by the UN Secretary-General is an indicator of the importance of sharing IGF observations with venues not traditionally engaged with IGF. Working with the MAG, the LP seeks to capture key messages and to stimulate progress towards the Internet we want and need. These initiatives are also intended to bring under-

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represented perspectives to the annual IGF and the NRIs. The addition of tracks to include legislators and regulators, among others, are indicators of the capacity of the IGF to adapt to new needs for governance of the Internet.

10. What are the challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes?

Part of the IGF's mandate has always been to "strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries." The challenges - political, technological, and economic - of providing equal opportunities for all people to engage in a multistakeholder Internet governance process have been and remain extremely difficult to comprehensively resolve.

The IGF has endeavored to address these challenges in a variety of ways - holding the annual event in a wide variety of locations, improving remote participation capabilities (including via remote hubs), fostering and showcasing national and regional Internet governance initiatives, initiating targeted programmes such as the Youth and Parliamentary Tracks. There are many successes that we can point to; however, the larger challenge still remains, and the increasing spread of digital technologies into all aspects of our societies only reinforces the need to provide all stakeholders with the chance to contribute to governance processes and discussions. We see this playing out in relation to specific issues, such as the need to promote the development of websites and applications that comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to guarantee equal access for all users, the need for policies that enforce inclusivity in the digital space, or the need to encourage companies and organizations to prioritize accessibility and usability.

As ever, funding is central to enabling the level of engagement necessary to ensure that everyone can engage on an equal footing. As the UN considers the future of the WSIS process, due consideration must be given to ensuring the financial viability of this essential work and the ability of all stakeholders to engage effectively.

At the same time, there exist structural trends and tendencies that threaten to exacerbate engagement challenges for all stakeholders, including governments. In 2022, the IGF Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation (PNIF) identified, as part of a broader framework for discussing Internet fragmentation, the risk of fragmentation of Internet governance and coordination. The PNIF noted that this risk manifested as:

- a changing commitment to the multistakeholder management of the technical layer of the Internet;

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-   a lack of a global commitment and framework across multilateral and multistakeholder venues, governments, and stakeholders to address global Internet policy issues from a human rights and free flow of data perspective.

Recent years have seen an expansion in the range of policy and structural responses to digital issues, including in the UN itself, which will endeavor to reach agreement on a Global Digital Compact ahead of the WSIS 20-year review, and may also negotiate a new international treaty on cybercrime in that period. The Secretary-General himself has identified the risk of "fragmented and irregular policy discussions [on] digital coordination" [Our Common Agenda], and such fragmentation is all the more problematic for stakeholders with limited capacity and resources to actively participate in an ever-increasing range of venues and initiatives.

The existing WSIS architecture - comprising the Action Lines under the responsibility of the ITU, UNESCO, UNDP, and other UN entities, with the CSTD as focal point for follow-up, the Internet Governance Forum, and the annual WSIS Forum - provides a solid basis that can and should be adapted to address new challenges, for example in the fields of artificial intelligence, data governance, and meaningful connectivity.

As the original agreements and institutional mechanisms are reviewed and updated to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose, it is essential to retain a clear and coordinated approach that builds on the strengths and successful track record of the existing structures and cooperative arrangements. Furthermore, the principles and commitments agreed within the context of the Global Digital Compact in 2024 should be taken into account during the WSIS+20 review. The follow-up to the GDC should also be embedded in the WSIS architecture with periodic, multistakeholder reviews and evaluation led by the IGF's global multistakeholder community in consultation with the national and regional IGFs.

11. How are these challenges being addressed? What approaches have proved to be effective in your experience?

The WSIS process architecture comprising the leading UN departments and agencies, the WSIS Forum and the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF), has proved an effective means for furthering international cooperation and harnessing multistakeholder engagement to address new opportunities and challenges. This does not diminish the need to evolve and improve the architecture in order to keep in step with the rapid pace of technological evolution - for example in AI - and to respond to the new challenges that emerge.

It is important to recognise that the WSIS architecture has proven itself to be adept at driving and managing its own successful evolution. For example, a multistakeholder Leadership Panel was established in 2022 by the UN Secretary-General, with the aim of advising the IGF on its strategy

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for addressing emerging and urgent issues, and defining its priorities. This evolution of the WSIS architecture can be attributed to the close and effective cooperation between the different elements in that architecture, but it is equally vital to acknowledge the bottom-up, community-driven nature of many of those improvements.

Furthermore, the Internet governance community's support for the development of the IGF intersessional initiatives - Best Practice Forums, Policy Networks, the diverse range of Dynamic Coalitions, and the global network of national and regional initiatives - has expanded the reach and the capacity of multistakeholder Internet governance to identify policy solutions and advance cooperation in ways not envisaged in the original WSIS agreements.

These developments reinforce the wisdom and foresight of the WSIS outcomes, particularly their identification of an inclusive multistakeholder model as the most effective and sustainable approach to digital governance. The involvement of all interested stakeholders - from governments, civil society, the private sector, technical communities, and academia - helps to create not only the inclusive environment we need and strive for but also the practical and cohesive solutions that we seek.

The WSIS+20 review is an opportunity to modernize and update our international cooperation architecture, but we can only achieve this goal by building on the successful work and innovation that has been at the heart of the WSIS process, and avoiding duplication of existing governance frameworks and institutions.

12. What do you consider the most important trends in technology and other aspects of ICTs which have affected implementation of WSIS outcomes since the Summit? What has been their impact?

The trend towards ubiquity of Internet and digital technologies in our lives and societies can be seen as the overarching trend affecting the implementation of the WSIS outcomes. While this trend was suggested in the WSIS outputs, the pace and extent of change could not have been fully foreseen, nor the specific challenges that would accompany such widespread adoption and integration of these technologies in our societies.

In this regard, the IGF's responsiveness and adaptability have been of paramount importance. Both in its annual event programme and its intersessional work, the IGF ecosystem has evolved over the past two decades in direct response to new and emerging transformative technologies such as the Internet of Things (through the work of the IGF's Best Practice Forum on IoT, Big Data & AI, and the Dynamic Coalition on IoT) and the recent major advances in artificial intelligence (particularly through the work of the IGF's Policy Network on AI). When these new technologies are adopted and integrated into society, they change the broader social and economic landscape,

and create new questions for policymakers and stakeholder communities to consider at the global, regional and national IGFs with the aim of identifying potential solutions and policy recommendations.

As the world's reliance on the Internet and digital technology continues to expand, the questions about cybersecurity risks and threats, the rights and protection of users against online harms, the responsibilities and accountability of service providers and media platforms, and the need to ensure meaningful access for disadvantaged communities, are all major challenges that have grown increasingly urgent.

The IGF has responded to this urgency, notably through the exchanges of information, the sharing of experience with national and regional policies and best practices, and new research conducted by experts in the IGF's Best Practice Forums, Policy Networks, and Dynamic Coalitions. Their outputs assist government policymakers, regulators, and corporate decision takers in devising new solutions, guidelines, toolkits for capacity building, and consensus-based policy recommendations.

13. What should be the priorities for stakeholders seeking to achieve WSIS outcomes and progress towards the Information Society, taking into account ongoing and emerging trends?

The scope of the Information Society has expanded significantly since the original WSIS events, a fact demonstrated by the breadth of discussions at recent IGF events - the 2023 IGF in Kyoto structured its proceedings around eight distinct themes, each comprising its own collection of policy and governance challenges:

(1) AI and Emerging Technologies
(2) Avoiding Internet Fragmentation
(3) Cybersecurity, Cybercrime and Online Safety
(4) Data Governance and Trust
(5) Digital Divides and Inclusion
(6) Global Digital Governance and Cooperation
(7) Human Rights and Freedoms
(8) Sustainability and Environment

The WSIS+20 review obligates us to consider future WSIS structures and processes, and what must be prioritized if we are to progress towards the Information Society envisaged in those initial discussions. All of the themes identified above are priorities - the WSIS project must provide us with the tools, frameworks, and structures to address them all in a coordinated and cooperative way.

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The original WSIS outputs concluded that achieving a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society" would require an approach to technical and public policy issues that "should involve all stakeholders" (from paragraph 35 of the Tunis Agenda); the Tunis Agenda created the IGF as a space to foster and facilitate this multistakeholder involvement. Carrying forward that conclusion, a clear priority should be to ensure the continuation of a sustainable, inclusive, and continuously improving platform for all stakeholders, where they can come together and cooperate, within their respective roles and responsibilities, towards achieving the WSIS vision.

While this may sound straightforward, it is important to be clear-eyed about the obstacles and challenges to this approach, and the WSIS+20 review should address these, whether it be the need for more sustainable funding, adequate resources, effective integration and coordination with other digital cooperation processes, or new modalities to deliver substantive outcomes that can concretely assist stakeholders and policy-makers. Progress has been made in all of these areas over the lifespan of the IGF, and it is clear that the success of the multistakeholder approach requires participants from all stakeholder groups to prioritize active and open engagement in multistakeholder processes.

14. How will ongoing trends and new developments in technology, especially in the deployment, access, and use of ICTs, impact future progress toward human development, specifically in relation to the SDGs?

The Internet and digital technologies are cross-cutting in relation to global development issues, and have the potential to directly support the advancement of two-thirds of the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, this will only be realized if regulations for new technologies, their access, and deployments are drafted in a nuanced manner, considering potential harm, respect for human rights, scope for industry innovation, and the need to protect sovereign interests. Such nuance (and regulatory interoperability) requires a deliberate and cooperative approach, drawing on the expertise, insight, and experience of different stakeholders. There is a need for forums where all stakeholders can meet to exchange perspectives and deliberate on the potential challenges, opportunities, threats and best practices on an equal footing - it is this role that can be (and has successfully been) played by the IGF and its ecosystem.

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> **15. Please add any other comments that you wish to make on the subject of the review that you believe would be helpful. We would also welcome any documents, reports, etc. that you can forward which you think will provide useful evidence for the review.**

The United Nations Internet Governance Forum is unquestionably one of the key outcomes of the WSIS process, and should be regarded as a true success. Over nearly two decades of existence, it has continuously evolved and improved to respond to new technologies, new demands of stakeholders, and new Internet and digital governance challenges. The result is an ecosystem of communities, events, initiatives, and work output that has provided important and necessary support to policy-makers and Internet users alike. It has done so while pioneering a unique and responsive multistakeholder model, focusing on openness, inclusivity, and proactive engagement, reflecting the principles laid out in the WSIS outcomes.

The IGF is not static, however, nor has it achieved all that might be aspired to. There remain challenges to realizing the WSIS vision and to achieving all that is contained in the mandate of the IGF. As the WSIS 10-year review noted, though, improvement has long been a focus of the IGF itself, many examples of which have been detailed in this response to the CSTD's questionnaire - the creation of diverse, output-focused intersessional activities; the support and integration of a huge network of national, regional, and sectoral Internet governance initiatives; the establishment of the IGF Leadership Panel.

There are reasonable and powerful demands from citizens that public policy-makers engage with the challenges posed by Internet and digital technologies, and much has changed in the last 20 years: the World Summit on the Information Society remains our best effort to respond to these demands in a globally coordinated way, and the Internet Governance Forum remains a vital instrument of the WSIS process, fostering productive engagement between the Internet's many stakeholder groups. These are strong foundations upon which to build, while avoiding fragmentation of our understanding and policy-making, duplication of effort, or the inefficient use of scarce human and financial resources.

The IGF Secretariat has made annual reports to the CSTD on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society. These are available at: https://intgovforum.org/en/content/cstd-reports-1

Additionally, annual reports on the Internet Governance Forum event can be found at: https://intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-annual-meetings-proceedings

Outputs of the 2023 IGF work cycle (including reports of the active Policy Networks and Best Practice Forums) can be found at: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2023-outputs

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Finally, information on all the IGF Dynamic Coalitions, including their outputs, is available at: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/dynamic-coalitions

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