

First IGF 2024 Open Consultations

27 February 2024

[Transcript] Statement from Sorene Assefa, UN Economic Commission for Africa – ECA

Okay, distinguished delegates, team colleagues, and participants from around the globe, I extend to you warm greetings this morning, afternoon, or evening, depending on your current location. My name is Sorene Assefa. I will be representing UNECA to share with you the Internet governance activities undertaken in our region, Africa, during the year of 2023.

Recognizing UNECA's crucial role in advocating for inclusive and transparent Internet governance across Africa, our primary objective is to amplify the continent's voice within the global digital agenda. This commitment extends to ensuring that the benefits of sustainable digital transformation are accessible to all Africans, thereby advancing the sustainable development goals.

At the core of our mission lies the imperative to tackle the digital infrastructure disparities, bridging our policy gaps in governing emerging technologies, and cultivating talent capable of responding to technological advancement, while also fostering capacity development for fair and equitable digital evolution.

In 2023, UNECA led significant initiatives in Internet governance through collaborative efforts with a diverse range of stakeholders. These initiatives addressed pressing issues to the continent, including global digital governance, digital public infrastructure and its safeguards, the gender digital divide, cybersecurity, and digital rights, among others.

UNECA remains steadfast in its commitment to the principle of inclusivity within its governance forums. As a supporter of IGF, regional and global initiatives in forums, including the WSIS and WSIS+20 Review, which will be conducted before May, aligning it with the global digital compact.

In terms of policy, UNECA facilitated the formulation of an African policy declaration for the global digital compact through regional review meetings. This collaborative effort engaged the Office of the Special Envoy on Technology, the Government of South Africa, the UN Regional Coordinator's Office for South Africa, and UNDP. This underscores Africa's pivotal role in shaping the global digital compact and ensuring active participation in determining its digital future.

Under digital ID and interoperability, UNECA has been supporting Member States in the implementation of good digital ID framework principles in three focus countries: Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Cameroon. Through its Connected African Girls initiative, in collaboration with UN Women, ITU, and partner governments, UNECA hosted coding camps to address the gender divide and ICT skill gap for girls aged between 12 to 25. This coding camp has successfully reached over 40,000 young girls across 8 African countries.

UNECA, in partnership with the Rwandan Government, has established a STEM center in Kigali to advance STEM education across Africa. Also, UNECA has established, in collaboration with the Republic of Congo, an African Center for Research and Coordination in Artificial Intelligence.

This year, UNECA will be working on capacity building, continuing to conduct comprehensive training programs tailored to government officials and African parliamentarians on cybersecurity, content responsibility, and governance processes. UNECA will also be focused on bridging the digital divide. Currently, we are in the process of collaborating with ITU's and UNICEF's Giga initiative to connect every African school to the Internet by 2023, supporting government connectivity, infrastructure, and utilizing innovative financial models.

In conclusion, UNECA calls for collective action in shaping a positive digital future. We emphasize the importance of breaking down silos, sharing information, and engaging all stakeholders. Thank you for the opportunity.