

N I T E D   N A T I O N S



N A T I O N S   U N I E S

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**Closing Remarks**

**15th Annual Internet Governance Forum  
Internet Governance in the Age of Uncertainty**

**CLOSING SESSION**

**Tuesday, 17 November 2020 - 17:20-19:20 UTC (12:20 – 14:20 EST)**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,  
Colleagues and friends from around the world,

I am honored to join over 6,000 people from 173 countries, gathering online at this year's Internet Governance Forum.

This fits well into the motto of “Virtually Together”.

But it is also a stark reminder. The world continues to witness the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Societies are reeling from shut-downs, stay-at-home orders and widespread and mounting infection. As a result, we are moving towards an increasingly virtual world, from social distancing, to remote working and online learning.

As you heard from the Secretary-General, “The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the importance of digital technologies and transformation, and on the urgent need to enhance the role of the IGF as a platform for dialogue on proposed solutions....”

The lively discussions at this virtual IGF are captured by the overarching theme – “Internet Governance in the Age of Uncertainty”.

My own takeaways of this year's IGF, are:

- One, that we can no longer separate the development tracks of digitalization and sustainable development; and
- Two, more than ever, we need cross-fertilization and cooperation. These are critical for governance issues in data, environment, inclusion and trust – across borders, sectors, disciplines and generations.

We need to extend the multistakeholder approach to an *all*-stakeholder approach. And we need to continue integrating solutions and capacity building into the IGF.

Excellencies,

As we close the 15<sup>th</sup> IGF, we also cross the halfway mark of its 10-year mandate, renewed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015.

Guided by the UN Secretary-General's roadmap for digital cooperation, I will share the following six reflections on how we, collectively, can advance the IGF:

First, on having a more focused agenda. The strategy to have selected themes and well-defined issues should continue. It sharpens our focus on what matters most, and streamlines the discussions and outputs of the IGF.

There should also be continuity between the annual sessions. We see, for example, the spotlight on DATA this year, building on the discussions last year in Berlin.

Second, on integrating high-level leaders track that involves ministers, parliamentarians and other leaders.

I am encouraged by the dynamic exchange and concrete policy recommendations that we heard at this year's high-level leaders track. They focused on the role of the Internet and digital technologies in responding to COVID-19 and uncertainties, and how we can recover better.

I am equally encouraged by the active participation of parliaments from around the world. And, by the cooperation between parliaments and dynamic coalitions that were forged at this Parliamentary Roundtable.

We will also make renewed efforts to report the outcomes of the IGF to UN intergovernmental processes.

Third, on forging stronger links among the global Forum and its national, regional and youth initiatives, or NRIs.

I would be remiss if I do not highlight the central role of NRIs in shaping the bottom-up inclusive nature of the IGF. Even though the network of NRIs is expanding, national governments, legislators and businesses can benefit from improved representation at the NRIs. I strongly encourage the global community to invest, contribute and strengthen the role of the NRIs.

The UN family, including the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA, is committed to work with all partners to provide more capacity development for the NRIs. And, in strengthening their collective work as part of the global IGF ecosystem.

Fourth, on integrating programme and intersessional work of the IGF.

The relevance of the IGF's Best Practice Forums and Dynamic Coalitions has been clearly proven. But we need to do more in establishing linkages and coherence between sessions – as well as with other intergovernmental and international bodies.

Fifth, on the long-term sustainability of the IGF. The IGF and its small Secretariat rely on external funds to function well. During the pandemic, our donors continued to support us.

I wish to extend a big thanks to all donors. I also thank the Polish government for their financial contribution to support this year's virtual IGF.

Sixth, on enhancing the visibility and identity of the IGF.

I extend a special thanks to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the government of United Kingdom. They are generously supporting the IGF in revamping its portal and underlying technology, so that the IGF can better serve as a platform to the global community.

The IGF will also benefit from an effective communications strategy in guiding its work, starting 2021.

Under the personal leadership and guidance of the UN Secretary-General, let us work together to advance the implementation of his Roadmap and to enhance the broad impact of a strengthened IGF.

Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

COVID-19 has caused loss of life, brought untold hardship and uncertainties to people around the world. At the same time however, it has shone a spotlight on the possibilities of the new normal, which is more digital than ever.

Not only is this the first-ever virtual Internet Governance Forum. Indeed, allow me to mention other firsts:

- Half of the participants at this IGF – over 3,300 – are newcomers;
- All high level and main sessions are streamed, for the first time, over UN TV, receiving high visibility;
- Not only are we joined by the UN Secretary-General. We also have the honour of having both the President of the General Assembly, as well as the President of Economic and Social Council; and
- IGF 2020 will be remembered also as a year of focus on youth. I believe the commitment to engaging youth will continue in 2021.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) and its Chair, Ms. Anriette Esterhuysen. The MAG quickly adjusted to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They worked tirelessly in the last few months to bring you this virtual IGF.

Thank you to all MAG members, and to many others who contributed to this year's rich programme.

I also thank our future hosts - Poland in 2021, Ethiopia in 2022, Japan in 2023, and the Russian Federation in 2025. And I invite other Member States to consider hosting the 2024 IGF.

With the deep commitment of these future host countries, we expect increased participation of developing countries.

UN DESA – under the direct guidance of the Secretary-General and his Executive Office -- stands ready to support stakeholders to carry forward the IGF's mandate.

Colleagues and friends.

We are at a critical moment as the world faces challenges of a historic nature. I am deeply encouraged by the success of this virtual IGF. Yet it is our physical world that helps to define our humanity. I look forward to our physical gathering next December in Katowice.

I thank you.

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