12 November 2015

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to transmit herewith a summary of the key messages and proposals from the Second Informal Interactive Consultation on the Overall Review by the General Assembly of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, which I convened on 19 October 2015 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Mogens Lykketoft

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

The Second Informal Interactive Stakeholders Consultation on the Overall Review by the General Assembly of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society

United Nations Headquarters, New York

19 October 2015

President's Summary

Introduction

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/302, the President of the General Assembly convened the second informal interactive consultation with all relevant stakeholders of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) on 19 October 2015. The purpose of the consultation was to collect views on the zero draft of the outcome document of the WSIS+10 overall review to be adopted at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on 15 and 16 December 2015.

The stakeholder consultation comprised an opening segment, interactive panel discussions on the subjects of ICT for development, Internet governance, and human rights and building confidence and security in the use of ICTs, and a closing segment. Questions were also accepted from social media feeds. The following is a summary of key messages and proposals.

Opening segment

It was recalled that the overall review provides an opportunity to take stock of progress towards a people-centred, inclusive, development-oriented information society, and assess challenges such as the digital divide, Internet stability, data ownership, privacy and freedom of expression. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development constitutes a comprehensive framework to advance efforts to enhance human knowledge and bridge the digital divide. Science, technology, and innovation, and ICT have been identified as crucial means of implementation of the SDGs.

Inputs provided by stakeholders in the first consultation in July and thereafter covered a range of views. These views were carefully studied and taken into account in preparation of the zero draft of the outcome document. The continuing inputs of all stakeholders through an inclusive preparatory process will be very important for understanding priorities and reaching an agreement that is accepted by all.

ICT for development

Speakers stressed that the joint efforts of all stakeholders will be needed to bridge the digital divide and achieve a people-centred and inclusive development-oriented information society. ICT has great potential to bridge economic and social gaps, generate livelihoods and reduce poverty, protect the environment, promote good governance, and improve dialogue and understanding among peoples. The evolution of technology over the last ten years has been remarkable, thus increasing its transformative potential. Yet, challenges remain. The zero

draft notes that 60 per cent of people still lack Internet access, and in many parts of the world with access, the quality of that access and ability to make use of ICT are significant concerns.

Alongside infrastructure, advances such as big data, user-generated content and social media also raise important questions of human rights, ethics and social responsibility. ICT is an enabler that can lead to a better quality of life for people. It also shapes society and affects rights. There could be a stronger reference to human rights in the outcome document.

Speakers underlined the achievements and potential of ICT across all sectors, for example in areas such as e-government, education, agriculture and fisheries. ICT has helped to improve educational outcomes, and promote skills development and employment at the community level. All such efforts should continue to be supported and the outcome document should be more specific about them.

Speakers noted that an inclusive, participatory and open Internet should be assured with particular attention paid to engaging women and marginalized groups in development. Ensuring access for women is important and so are efforts to promote inclusion of women in policymaking processes. Language on gender in the outcome document should be strengthened. Gender mainstreaming in the various areas of WSIS implementation should also be pursued. Such efforts to promote inclusion could be supported by well-established methods of ICT-enabled consultation and collaboration.

The promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity remains a concern. In this respect, it would be crucial to develop and implement strategies to protect cultural rights and expand availability of local content in native languages, bearing in mind the difficulties imposed by financial constraints in many countries. It was noted that ICT innovation has not always led to universal inclusion and full realization of knowledge societies. Culture and cultural rights should be added to the outcome document.

Stakeholders noted policies that undermine innovation should be avoided. Greater attention should be paid to ensuring that new ICTs are available to more people and that the benefits of innovation are more widely distributed. It was suggested that indictors should be improved to measure ICT's impact on society and people's life. Commenting on the zero draft assertion that ICT innovation could exacerbate digital divides, one speaker remarked that this has not been the case with regard to mobile broadband technology: restrictive policies contribute to divides rather than technological innovation.

Stakeholders elaborated on the need for a peaceful cyberspace stressing that there can be no sustainable development without peace. ICT has been used to strengthen early warning systems, support humanitarian action, facilitate peacekeeping, and promote post-conflict reconstruction, and should continue to support such functions. It was underscored that in putting ICT at the service of peace and security, respect for human rights must be upheld.

One speaker suggested that the zero draft needs to be more explicit about how the private sector is to be engaged. By way of example, the entertainment industry might contribute to measuring how people access information and respond to it.

Internet governance

Stakeholders recalled the definition of Internet governance set out in the Tunis Agenda and included the zero draft, and stressed its utility as a starting point going forward. Internet governance is not only concerned with processes and norms at the global level. Policies influencing the way people use the Internet in everyday life are also part of Internet governance. Accordingly, promoting an open and democratic approach is crucial. One speaker commented that Internet governance comprises both governance *of* the Internet and governance *on* the Internet.

Another speaker noted that international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet are different from technical matters, which are addressed at a different level.

A number of speakers commented on the question of participation in Internet governance processes. Speakers underscored that the multistakeholder model of governance, and enhanced cooperation, should be better reflected in the outcome document, bearing in mind the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholder groups. The outcome document should embrace inclusive approaches and commit to the effective and meaningful participation of all stakeholders, including grass-roots groups and the private sector. Financial mechanisms could support such efforts.

Speakers noted that the nature of stakeholder consultations has evolved over the last ten years. Whereas consultations used to be concerned mostly with technical matters, nowadays stakeholders represent the interests of different groups. The language of the outcome document should be much more inclusive, in particular with regard to women and SMEs from developing countries. It could also include a paragraph on participation of cities in Internet governance, based on multistakeholder processes with public involvement.

Speakers commented that stakeholders are not necessarily all on an equal footing and have different roles and responsibilities, including within a democratic system. Regardless of political arrangements, development is enhanced through the sharing of knowledge and availability of networks enabled by multistakeholder participation.

Speakers noted that there are some important human rights matters that have not been addressed by Internet governance bodies. The gap should be clearly reflected in the outcome document along with a commitment to human rights protection. It was also acknowledged that governments are addressing rights in such bodies as the Human Rights Council.

Support was expressed for continuation of the Internet Governance Forum, without conditions, while recognizing the need for greater transparency and the more effective participation of developing countries.

On the subject of net neutrality in the outcome document, speakers underscored the importance of managing the Internet in the public interest as a global public facility. Maintaining an open Internet is essential. In addition, net neutrality is connected to the issue of quality of access. One speaker commented that a commitment to protect net neutrality may not be appropriate in the outcome document as it appears to be a one-size-fits-all regulation that warrants further study.

Human rights and building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

Speakers stressed that the WSIS framework was underpinned by a commitment to human rights and supported inclusion of human rights in the outcome document. Internet principles should be aligned with human rights principles, and the commitment in the outcome document to protection of the same rights online as offline is welcome. There should also be a sufficient reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Recognition of the right to privacy in the digital age should be included alongside a commitment to respect for freedom of information. States should be open about procedures and practices concerning access to information and implementation of all human rights obligations in accordance with human rights law. Speakers commented that an inclusive approach to human rights should be taken in the outcome document, including with regard to economic, social and cultural rights, and labour rights. At the same time, with rights come duties of the individual rights' bearer, which could also be reflected.

The challenge of protecting the rights of persons with disabilities was underscored. There is a need to ensure that information technology was accessible to persons with disabilities. Digitalisation can lead to new barriers for people with disabilities, especially in the developing world. There is a need to recognize this gap in the outcome document and find a way to address it.

With regard to cybersecurity, speakers stressed the importance of using ICT for peaceful purposes, consistent with principles of international law enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Where international law is concerned, one speaker commented that the outcome document should be careful to avoid statements that could lead to problematic interpretation.

Speakers noted that additional capacity-building would be needed for dealing with cybersecurity, while recognizing that it is difficult to keep pace with security challenges, both legally and technically, as the technology evolves. The importance of respecting sovereignty of independent states was also stressed. As the situation and challenges are different in countries, different approaches are adopted in addressing these challenges. Some countries tend to rely on self-regulation in the area of cybersecurity while others take a legislative approach. The private sector has participated fully in addressing challenges, inter alia by highlighting security issues. Education and awareness-raising are also part of the response. It was also suggested that there is a need for an international cybersecurity framework.

Participants noted that safety of users could be improved while acknowledging that enhancing online safety also depended on capacity-building, for example by educating children on the safe use of ICT.

Conclusion

Over the course of the day, speakers emphasized that there has been great progress in the last ten years, and important impacts of ICT on society, economy and daily interaction for many people. ICT and the Internet can be expected to make a substantial contribution to the achievement of the SDGs. Speakers reiterated that the vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development oriented information society was a hallmark of WSIS and should be stressed in the further implementation of WSIS outcomes.

Bridging the digital divide must be a priority. Infrastructure development must go hand-in-hand with relevant information, for example through promotion of open government and access to information, linguistic and cultural diversity, and local content and services.

Speakers underscored the role of private sector investment in ICT access, content and services, and of legal and regulatory frameworks conducive to responsible investment.

Speakers clearly signalled that participation of all stakeholders in their respective roles and responsibilities should be stressed and encouraged at all levels. Internet governance should be open, inclusive and transparent. A number of speakers reaffirmed that respect for human rights is an elemental feature of the information society, and will remain a central concern in the further implementation of WSIS outcomes. Participants underscored the centrality of the right to freedom of expression and the free flow of information, and recalled that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online.

Speakers underscored that the security and stability of the Internet remain of vital concern, and called attention to promoting a global culture of cybersecurity and cyber safety, and stressed the importance of capacity-building in this crucial area.

Finally, on implementation and follow-up, speakers expressed support for a focus on practical implementation measures that address the full set of WSIS Action Lines, within the context of the SDGs. Speakers concurred that more work would be needed on data collection and analysis, and better use of indicators, for example on the impact of ICT on sustainable development within and across countries.