Esteemed delegates,

Today, we come together to explore how we can shape a sustainable and inclusive digital future. Digital transformation is already reshaping our world and region, often against the backdrop of conflict, increasing the vulnerability of civilians in unprecedented ways.

This underscores the importance of those two words: sustainable and inclusive. Our responsibility is to ensure the *Global Digital Compact* steers digital transformation in a way that is ethical, equitable, and humane—whether in times of war or peace, in government services or in everyday life for the most vulnerable: the poor, women, persons with disabilities, and all those at risk of being left behind.

As we gather, it's essential to recognize the significant challenges the Arab region faces, from ongoing conflicts to economic instability. These challenges make discussions on digital transformation not just timely, but urgent. In a world where access to digital services determines livelihoods and futures, the digital divide is no longer just a gap in connectivity—it's a widening divide in opportunity, one that threatens to leave many behind.

At ESCWA, we are focusing our efforts on moving beyond improving infrastructure and towards reducing the digital divide, fostering innovation and building trust and partnerships across the region.

First, Through the *Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) Maturity Index*, we're helping our member states to evaluate and enhance their digital services, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of citizens. This is a platform where countries can not only learn from each other's successes but also collaborate to ensure no one is left behind in the digital transition.

Second, we're leading efforts to integrate emerging technologies like AI and blockchain into public services One example is our AI-powered tool, *Mustashar*, which is transforming how policymakers' access and analyze data, allowing for better, more informed, impactful policies. It's these kinds of innovations that are reshaping the way we address challenges in sustainable development and can help lift people out of poverty and marginalization.

Third, in a region facing such significant challenges, cooperation is more important than ever. The digital transformation journey cannot be achieved in isolation. Through platforms like the *Arab International Digital Cooperation and Development Forum* (DCDF), we are creating spaces where leaders from governments, civil society, and the private sector can come together to exchange knowledge and strategies. It's through these kinds of dialogues and regional collaboration that we strengthen our collective resilience and ensure that digital transformation truly benefits everyone.

And finally, through initiatives like the *Arab Internet Governance Forum (IGF) we are building trust in digital governance*. By creating a space for inclusive dialogue on Internet governance, we've been able to support policies that foster digital trust, which is critical for the success of any digital initiative. Our work here directly connects to global efforts, such as the *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS),* and ensures that our region plays a leading role in these important conversations.

On a broader scale, ESCWA's involvement in shaping the *Global Digital Compact*—a core element of the *Pact for the Future*—has been a source of pride for us. For the past two years, we've worked tirelessly to ensure that the voices and interests of the Arab states were reflected in this global framework. Now, our focus is on translating these global agreements into regional action through the *Arab Digital Agenda*. We'll be discussing these topics in more depth at DCDF 2024 in Amman, where we'll continue working to turn these commitments into concrete steps forward for our region.

Before moving on, I would like to share a short video that highlights how ESCWA is using AI to enhance communication and engagement across the region.

(Play video: https://youtu.be/qYcpc647m9o *)*

As you can see, that was my digital avatar delivering part of the message. This is one of many ways we're embracing AI to stay connected, even in challenging times. It reflects our commitment to using technology not just for efficiency, but to

find creative ways to solve challenges and bring more people into the conversation.

In conclusion, despite the conflicts and challenges we face, the *Pact for the Future* and *Global Digital Compact* provide a clear path for building an inclusive, resilient digital future. At ESCWA, we are committed to turning these frameworks into real benefits for all, especially the vulnerable. This is about more than policies—it's about transforming lives in our homes, schools, and workplaces. Through equality, fairness, justice, and peace, we can build a future where no one is left behind, even in adversity

Thank you