

318 EAST 48^{TH} STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10017 TEL: (212) 826 0840 FAX: (212) 826 2964

INPUT BY THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE FOR THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT, 30TH APRIL 2023

Singapore's input for the Global Digital Compact comprises all statements delivered by Singapore as part of the Global Digital Compact's consultation process, including statements made at each of the thematic deep-dives.

This document currently contains the following statements delivered by Singapore:

- Singapore's statement delivered at the first informal consultations on the Global Digital Compact on 30 January 2023
- Singapore's statement delivered at the first thematic deep-dive on "digital inclusion and connectivity" on 27 March 2023
- Singapore's statement delivered at the second thematic deep-dive on "internet governance" on 13 April 2023
- Singapore's statement delivered at the third thematic deep-dive on "data protection" on 24 April 2023

This document will be updated as further statements are delivered by Singapore at upcoming thematic deep-dives taking place in May and June 2023.



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INTERVENTION BY AMBASSADOR BURHAN GAFOOR OF SINGAPORE AT THE FIRST INFOMRAL CONSULATIONS ON THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT, TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL CHAMBER AT UNHQ, MONDAY, 30 JANUARY 2023, 10.00AM.

- 1 Co-facilitators, thank you for your work and thank you for convening this meeting. I'm very much in agreement with many of the comments that have been made. Let me first of all start by endorsing the statement made by the Ambassador of Cuba, who has spoken for a large group of countries (i.e. the G77). We associate ourselves with that statement.
- I wanted to give some reactions to some of the statements but also give some comments on the idea of a Global Digital Compact. <u>First</u>, I think the idea of a roadmap and the thematic deep dives will be very useful going forward. But I think for subsequent discussions it might be useful to have some guiding questions from the co-facilitators so that we can have focused discussions.
- <u>Second</u>, there's been a lot of comments made with regard to digital literacy. I think it's important not only to elevate the level of digital literacy here in New York, but also in our capitals, and therefore I think it is important to give time in between the sessions. If there is a way to loosen the roadmap to allow for adequate time, that will be very much useful without fundamentally altering the roadmap. I do like the idea of having advance notice of such a roadmap, but I think with the current schedule many of us would not be able to get sufficient guidance from capitals.
- Third, as we prepare for the Ministerial Meeting in September, it will be useful to get updates from the different UN agencies and bodies, in terms of what they are doing in the digital domain. I think it is important to have that landscape survey of what is already being done by the UN system in the digital domain before we go into the deep dives on very specific issues. So that is a suggestion that I'm putting to the co-facilitators. The other suggestion I have is that it is important that in the preparation for the SDG Summit, we do an audit of the 17 SDG goals to see how the digital dimension can accelerate the implementation of the 17 goals. And I would suggest that the two co-facilitators can also make a presentation at the SDG Summit itself to underline how the digital dimension can accelerate the implementation of the SDG goals, but also identify the gaps that have not allowed some of the

implementation of the SDG goals. On education, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that digital technologies can be accelerated in terms of reaching larger segments of population to deliver education, but it has also shown that infrastructure, access to computers, and digital divide are real problems. And therefore, I think it's worth thinking about bringing the digital discussion into the SDG Summit right at the outset.

- Now, let me now return to the topic of the Global Digital Compact. I would agree with those who have said that this must be action-oriented, it must be pragmatic, it must be policy-oriented. But it must also recognise the diversity of views and policies and systems around the world. Let's not get into the classic UN debate about harmonising and therefore homogenising structures and systems and societies. I think it's important that we accept the diversity of views and systems. Having recognised that of course, we must try our best to protect human rights, freedom of expression, inclusiveness, etc. But it all must start from the recognition that we are coming together as representatives of sovereign countries representing very diverse systems, but we are all committed to working together to find common ground. I think that's very important. Otherwise, my concern is that this process may become a proxy for some of the many difficult debates we had in other fora.
- 6 Let me conclude with three aspects of the GDC which are very important for Singapore. One is inclusiveness. The second is innovation. And the third is interoperability. I have made these comments before in a different setting (the GOF on Digital Technologies meeting on 23 November 2022). I call them the three "I"s. Inclusiveness means not just involving the stakeholders, but inclusiveness at the national level and at the global level, in terms of reaching out to every segment of society, every person on the planet, and the ideas of infrastructure, digital divide, digital skills, and universal connectivity all becomes important.
- 7 <u>Second</u>, the GDC must be a framework for innovation. It must facilitate innovation. It must encourage and empower innovation. That means talking to the private sector, or those who have innovative ideas because ultimately, we need them to be part of the solution.
- Thirdly, interoperability, which in a sense, relates to what the Secretary General said about fragmented systems, because if it's fragmented, it's not interoperable, and then we end up in silos. That does not create trust, engender cooperation, or lead to a multilateral system, and we will end up having this series of plurilateral structures. And that is not what the United Nations is about. It is fundamentally about creating a multilateral framework.

9 So these are some initial ideas. We look forward to participating actively in all the discussions. And once again, thank you for having volunteered to take up this herculean task, you have our support and we look forward to working with all delegations.



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INTERVENTION BY AMBASSADOR BURHAN GAFOOR OF SINGAPORE AT THE FIRST THEMATIC DEEP DIVE ON THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT ON THE ISSUE OF DIGITAL INCLUSION AND CONNECTIVITY, TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL CHAMBER AT UNHQ, MONDAY, 27 MARCH, 10.00AM.

- 1 Thank you very much, co-facilitators. Singapore is delighted to join this thematic deep dive and looks forward to the various other dialogues that you will be organising as well. I also want to thank both of you for your leadership in structuring the discussions today around the topic of digital inclusion and connectivity and thank you also for your guiding questions.
- Last week, the UN had a very significant conference on water, and we learned that 2 billion people lack access to running water. Today we have heard from the Secretary General of ITU, an advocate on this issue, that 2.7 billion people lack access to the internet or any kind of digital services. Given this, the issue that we are discussing in this room today is absolutely important. It is something that I think we as a diplomatic community in New York have not given the attention that it needs. I hope that this discussion on the Global Digital Compact that you have launched, cofacilitators, will attract the serious attention this issue deserves. For Singapore, we look at the Global Digital Compact as an accelerator for the implementation of the SDGs; an accelerator for inclusivity, including all segments of society, and also as an accelerator for partnerships between governments and between governments and civil society and stakeholders, whether it is the private sector or other civil society representatives. I want to acknowledge their participation in this deep dive. I know many are joining the discussions virtually. Thank you very much for your engagement.
- Now, let me address some of the issues with regard to digital inclusion and connectivity. We think that the starting point for the Global Digital Compact should be digital inclusion and connectivity. That would be a good way to build consensus around the Global Digital Compact. In this regard, I want to make a few points.
- 4 <u>First</u>, the Global Digital Compact must make a commitment to provide universal access and connectivity to the internet by 2030. The Secretary-General of the ITU earlier spoke about the estimated cost of doing so about US\$400 billion.

But if we do not address this issue now the cost will continue to escalate. It is also important that we do not look at this issue as a question of aid and assistance. This is not about aid and assistance. This is about investment and partnership, investing in our people and investing in our societies. It is on the basis of investment that we must build those partnerships. So it is not a question of going around asking for aid and assistance. Nonetheless, developing countries do need help in terms of building the partnerships and making the necessary investments. Now, there are certainly a lot of models for partnership with the private sector and other actors. But beyond the financial aspects, we should also look at the non-financial barriers to universal and affordable access. In ASEAN, at the regional level, we have a digital master plan known as the ASEAN Digital Master Plan 2025. Based on the experience we have had in ASEAN, many respondents to a survey conducted by the ASEAN Secretariat indicated that the real barriers to the deployment of digital infrastructure in ASEAN are not financial. This means that while money is available for a good investment, the real barriers are often non-financial in terms of building the infrastructure, in terms of getting planning permissions, and in terms of carrying out the various infrastructure projects and feasibility studies. We should not underestimate the nonfinancial barriers in this regard and I think that Singapore and ASEAN can share experiences in this area.

- The second point that I want to make is that connectivity is also a question of affordability. Many previous speakers have raised this too. Affordability relates to infrastructure, but it also relates to government policy. Fundamentally national authorities and governments have to be conscious about how they can ensure affordability and here we need to be open to a variety of approaches. In some cases, this will require a telecommunications sector that is fully liberalised as is the case in Singapore. We have a very competitive telecommunications sector for mobile operators. I think it is important to achieve that level of competition and private sector participation in order to achieve high standards for the consumer. For example, in Singapore, the average person pays less than US\$0.50 per gigabyte for mobile internet, while enjoying one of the fastest internet services in the world. Nonetheless, there is no one size fits all approach and every country needs to find its own path. This is where we need to recognise that different countries will have different approaches and not try and adopt a cookie cutter approach. In this regard, the Global Digital Compact can provide a platform for exchange of best practices. I think that will be the value of the Global Digital Compact.
- 6 My third point is about inclusivity. Inclusivity is of course about including different segments of society and the population, but the key to inclusivity at the global level is interoperability. In other words, if we all have 193 different national systems that operated according to its own sets of standards and regulations, we will

not be globally inclusive because the different national systems will not be able to communicate and connect with each other. If we want to be truly inclusive at the global level, we must work on interoperability. This is where I think the Global Digital Compact can put forward elements or ideas on how we can make our systems interoperable so that the different systems can communicate with each other, so that data can flow between systems, and so that there can be digital services provided between countries. I want to cite one example. This year in February, Singapore and India launched a linkage between our respective national payments systems (PayNow in Singapore and UPI in India) that will allow anyone in India plus anyone in Singapore to make payments to each other with a tap of their phone and with a click of a button. I think this really allows people in both countries to access services in each other's countries in a remarkable way. That, I think, is very exciting for our two countries, and we hope as Singapore that we will be able to have such partnerships with as many countries as possible.

- 7 The fourth point I want to make with regard to inclusivity and connectivity is digital literacy and skills. In Singapore, we promote digital skills for daily living and digital skills for employability, businesses, and education. These cater to citizens of all ages: through our National Digital Literacy programme for our children, Skills Framework for Infocomm Technology for our workforce, Seniors Go Digital programme for our elderly. More fundamentally, however, it is necessary to recognize that our citizens need to first have access to inclusively designed digital services that take their needs into account, through the use of which they can go on to build their digital literacy, competencies and skills. In this regard, it is important to think in terms of global best practices for the inclusive provision of government digital services. The Global Digital Compact can help to provide guidelines or best practice standards that governments can adopt voluntarily in order to enhance their own service delivery in a way to maximises inclusivity. In Singapore, all government e-services are required to follow a set of Digital Service Standards to ensure that digital services are accessible and user-friendly to meet the needs of diverse user groups, including the elderly and the less-abled. Our Digital Service Standards are also guided by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, an internationally adopted standard for digital accessibility. We can consider similar efforts at the international level as part of the GDC. Together, we can commit to ensuring that government eservices lead the way in inclusivity, and in this way we can set a benchmark and an example for others in the digital ecosystem to follow.
- 8 These are some of our initial ideas. This is an exciting and important topic and Singapore will continue to participate actively in these discussions. Thank you.



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INTERVENTION BY FIRST SECRETARY MATTHEW WONG OF SINGAPORE AT THE SECOND THEMATIC DEEP DIVE ON THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT ON THE ISSUE OF INTERNET GOVERNANCE, TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL CHAMBER AT UNHQ, THURSDAY, 13 APRIL, 10.00AM

- 1 Thank you very much, co-facilitators. I would like to thank you both for convening these discussions today and for the guiding questions you have provided.
- Given the internet's status as a shared global digital infrastructure and its role as a key enabler of digitalization, Singapore believes it is essential that the internet remains open, secure and interoperable. We must ensure that our internet governance mechanisms work in service of these goals. While governments have an important role to play in internet governance, Singapore believes that internet governance must be inclusive and responsive to be fully effective. Governments, industry, civil society and other stakeholders must work together to shape the development of the internet for the benefit of all.
- 3 In this regard, allow me to offer some ideas on how the Global Digital Compact (GDC) can help to re-affirm, re-vitalise, and re-energise our approach to internet governance.
- First, the GDC should encourage efforts to ensure that our internet governance mechanisms are truly global in nature. In this regard, Singapore supports the G77's statement that we should maximize the participation of developing countries in decisions regarding Internet governance. Singapore welcomes the work of the various IGF regional initiatives, as well as ICANN's decision in 2013 to begin establishing regional hubs. In this regard, Singapore is proud to have hosted the 2022 meeting of the Asia Pacific Regional IGF. Nonetheless, while the geographic expansion of institutions is welcome, it is not sufficient. We need to strengthen capacity-building and knowledge-sharing to ensure that policymakers, stakeholders and citizens from around the world, particularly those from developing countries, LDCs, and SIDS, are able to participate fully, equally and meaningfully in these discussions. The UN as an inclusive multilateral platform where all States, both large and small, have a voice can play a crucial role in this regard.

- Second, the GDC should reiterate the importance of digital inclusion and the acceleration of the SDGs as a key focus of internet governance mechanisms. While internet governance matters may be technical, they also have significant real-world impact on our ability to achieve these goals. ICANN's work on Internationalized Domain Names and Universal Acceptance is a significant positive example in this regard. In 2010, ICANN introduced the first internationalized top-level domains, allowing domain names to be fully written in non-Latin scripts. In 2011, Singapore introduced national top-level domains in Chinese and Tamil, allowing speakers of these languages to access the internet in a more inclusive way. However, even today, not all software is able to handle such queries appropriately, and as such we welcome ICANN's continued work promoting what is known as the Universal Acceptance principles. As was the case in this example, our internet governance mechanisms should be encouraged and empowered to make technical decisions in support of our broader sustainable development goals.
- Third, the GDC should reiterate the importance of interoperability as a key principle of internet governance. Three weeks ago, at our previous deep dive, Singapore spoke about the importance of ensuring that government digital services are not developed in national silos, but are instead designed to communicate and operate across systems and across borders. The same can be said for private-sector applications and services. While divergence and variation are a crucial factor for innovation, it is also important to ensure that users and information can move between and beyond individual technological ecosystems to ensure that all citizens and businesses can benefit from the full potential of the internet.
- 7 These are some of our initial ideas, and we look forward to continuing this conversation today and in the weeks ahead. Thank you.



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INTERVENTION BY FIRST SECRETARY MATTHEW WONG OF SINGAPORE AT THE THIRD THEMATIC DEEP DIVE ON THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT ON THE ISSUE OF DATA PROTECTION, TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL CHAMBER AT UNHQ, MONDAY, 24 APRIL 2023, 10.00AM

- 1 Thank you to the co-facilitators for convening today's discussions and for your guiding questions.
- Given the role of data as a critical resource in the digital domain, Singapore believes that any data protection regime must be balanced and well-calibrated, ensuring both the protection of individuals' data while supporting the use of data for innovation and growth. At the international level, it is imperative that we have international systems that can smoothly facilitate cross-border data transfers while also ensuring that personal data transferred across borders continues to be adequately protected.
- In line with the G77 and China's call for a meaningful, action-oriented Global Digital Compact (GDC) that can accelerate the achievement of the SDGs, we propose three concrete initiatives the GDC could adopt to allow us to seize the opportunities afforded by data in a responsible and well-regulated way.
- First, the GDC should encourage the development of tools and processes that enable innovators to extract value from datasets while ensuring the protection of personal data. These tools could be developed as digital public goods by UN agencies in partnership with interested States and stakeholders, and could be made freely available globally. The development of common global tools could also help facilitate cross-border data sharing by providing assurances that datasets have been anonymised, encrypted or otherwise protected to a sufficiently high standard. Allow me to share some examples of such initiatives that we are developing in Singapore. We have developed a Basic Anonymisation tool and guide to help organizations carry out basic anonymization of datasets. We are also working with trusted providers of Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PETs) as part of our PET Sandbox programme, which allows companies in Singapore to experiment with PETs in a supportive regulatory environment. We would be happy to share our experiences in more detail and work with the international community on the development of additional useful tools.

- Second, the GDC should take action to promote interoperability between various regional data sharing initiatives. As an example, consider the case of Model Contractual Clauses or Standard Contractual Clauses. These are template contractual terms that can be included in legal agreements between businesses to facilitate cross-border data transfers. Within ASEAN, we have developed the ASEAN Model Contractual Clauses for Cross-Border Data Flows, which can be used by firms operating across ASEAN. Other regional organizations have also developed similar initiatives. However, while such initiatives can facilitate cross-border data flows at the regional-level, more work is needed to ensure the global interoperability of these initiatives. In this regard, the UN could serve as a platform to bring together these various regional initiatives to explore possibilities for cooperation and harmonization.
- Third, the GDC should facilitate and encourage the development of global initiatives to facilitate cross-border data flows. Allow me to share one example as inspiration. In April 2022, Singapore, together with partners in APEC, co-founded the Global Cross Border Privacy Rules (CBPR) Forum to build upon and expand the APEC CBPR certification mechanism originally developed by the APEC economies. Our ambition is for the Global CBPR Forum to be an inclusive global mechanism for cross-border data sharing certification, and we invite all interested States to join the Global CBPR Forum. We would also be happy to share our experiences in more detail, which could help inform the further development of such initiatives under UN auspices.
- 7 These are some of our initial proposals for concrete initiatives the GDC could adopt, and we look forward to continuing this discussion in the weeks ahead. Thank you.