General Assembly

Seventy-eighth session

Official Records

Second Committee

Summary record of the 10th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 6 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr Amorín . . . . (Uruguay)
later: Ms. Hsieh . . . . (Thailand)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m

Agenda item 15: Information and communications technologies for sustainable development (A/78/62–E/2023/49)

Agenda item 19: Globalization and interdependence

  (a) **Science, technology and innovation for sustainable development** (A/78/232)

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1.   **Mr. González Sanz** (Head of Science, Technology and Innovation of the Division on Technology and Logistics, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)), speaking via video link to introduce the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (A/78/62–E/2023/49), said that three key elements related to the outcomes of the Summit were the changing context of digital cooperation, the impact of conflict and the risk of cyberconflict, and data governance. Digital cooperation was needed to move closer to universal inclusion in the digital economy; integrate the digital dimension into actions to address poverty, gender inequality and climate change; and address the growing threat posed by cybersecurity issues.

2.   Although 63 per cent of the global population was connected to the Internet, the least developed countries collectively still counted only 27 per cent of their populations as Internet users. That persistent connectivity divide could lead to a development divide. Digital cooperation, technology-sharing and partnerships remained crucial for connecting remote and underserved communities. Digitalization had led to a rise in conflicts in which digital technology played an increasingly central role. Information technologies were often among the major causes and means of conflict, from cyberattacks that disrupted infrastructure and services to the theft of sensitive information and the destabilizing potential of deep fakes and fake news. Countries lacking the cybersecurity infrastructure to protect themselves against such threats were liable to suffer disproportionately, amplifying global power imbalances. However, digital technologies could also provide tools that promoted accountability and accuracy, facilitated peacebuilding and helped to document and discourage human rights abuses.

3.   Conversations on regulation and governance were needed to address the multidimensional impact of digital data. Concerns included the geographical concentration of digital innovation and data management, problems of cross-border jurisdiction, competition policy, consumer rights and content moderation. International forums were increasingly concerned with such questions, raising the risk of fragmentation in their treatment. There was also a risk that a few stakeholders from technologically advanced economies would permanently dominate the global data economy. The Commission on Science and Technology for Development should be able to bring stakeholders together to collaboratively navigate those complex questions and help to develop solutions that served the global public interest.

4.   The General Assembly would review the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2025. With the support of the Commission, the review should enable Member States and other stakeholders to gain a clear understanding of the persistent and emerging challenges of digitalization and development, and could help to foster consensus on a vision for the future of the digital society, as well as on how to articulate that vision through the global digital compact and other processes.

5.   In his report on science, technology and innovation for development (A/78/232), the Secretary-General had highlighted the role of science, technology and innovation in accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and in the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emphasizing that the digital divide affected people's access to the benefits of technologies and risked further entrenching social divides. In order to assess national science, technology and innovation capabilities, UNCTAD had introduced a frontier technology readiness index in 2021, which it had updated in 2022. An analysis of 166 countries conducted in 2022 using the index had shown that developing countries, especially those in Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, risked being left behind by the current wave of technology. Governments of developing countries therefore needed to urgently build the capacity to take advantage of technological opportunities and create an enabling environment for innovators and relevant companies. Policies and initiatives in domains including energy, the environment and industry must be coordinated, through a whole-of-government approach. The Secretary-General had also highlighted the fact that the success of national policies depended on global cooperation.

6.   Member States were advised to conduct foresight and assessment exercises to identify challenges,

opportunities and new trends with a view to developing a strategic vision for the diffusion of science, technology and innovation. The Secretary-General had also proposed international mechanisms to support the formulation of an inclusive international agenda in the field, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Stronger international cooperation was needed to develop consistent normative frameworks, ethical guidelines, standards and regulations in order to harness the potential of frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, while minimizing risks.

7. Member States should identify, prioritize and nurture green technologies as potential sectors for sustainable diversification and structural transformation, and support the private sector and academia to invest in researching and developing products and services that addressed development needs. In addition, the international community must make international agreements on trade, intellectual property and climate change consistent, in order to incentivize climate action based on science, technology and innovation. A key message of the report was that, while developing countries should empower local research and innovation, concerted international efforts, including research collaboration, capacity-building and financial assistance, were needed to strengthen the capacity of national innovation systems for inclusive and sustainable development.

8. **Mr. Minchenberg** (Director of the New York Liaison Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNESCO Representative to the United Nations in New York), introducing the note by the Secretary-General on culture and sustainable development (A/78/217), said that the report transmitted in the note covered the two-year period since June 2021 and offered a review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 76/214, as well as trends and policy recommendations. It was based on a broad consultation involving UNESCO member States, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system entities, civil society and academia.

9. Since the previous exercise in 2021, global recognition of culture for sustainable development had clearly grown. For the first time, Member States had made a dedicated commitment to culture in the recently adopted political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly (political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit), and other major policy forums, including the Group of 77 and China, the Group of 20 and the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) had also

reflected such recognition. Culture was also increasingly being enshrined in regional policy frameworks, such as that of the African Union and the Pacific Community. The UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development had also marked a reinvigoration of commitment to policies that supported culture.

10. A major trend outlined in the report was the renewed commitment of States to the protection of cultural rights. In a context of setbacks for the exercise of cultural rights, States had reaffirmed respect for those rights as a precondition for inclusive, democratic societies and had developed policies to strengthen the status of artists and other cultural professionals. The international dialogue on the return and restitution of cultural property was also expanding.

11. States were increasingly integrating culture into their education systems, and the importance of cultural diversity in learning environments was increasingly acknowledged. States were also providing stronger support for the cultural and creative economy, particularly as part of economic diversification strategies. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Governments had developed recovery plans to enhance the cultural sector's resilience. In addition, States were increasingly adapting their cultural sectors to the digital transformation. They had reported persistent gaps related to digital skills, the remuneration of online cultural work and the digital transformation of museums. In the face of multifaceted crises, culture remained critical for peacebuilding and recovery from conflict. During the reporting period, culture had been harnessed to support conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery, with a focus on sustaining livelihoods and youth employment, notably with a view to preventing violent extremism. In Iraq and Lebanon, progress had continued under UNESCO initiatives aimed at empowering local communities to rebuild their historic landmarks, neighbourhoods, schools, museums and creative spaces. There was also renewed attention to the cultural rights of refugees, and evidence of deeper commitment to cultural diplomacy.

12. Yet another trend was the use of culture to support climate action and biodiversity protection. States were increasingly adopting resilience strategies for heritage sites. In addition, cultural institutions and creative industries were showing increasing commitment to greener processes. The positive contribution of culture to urban sustainability and strategies for localizing the Sustainable Development Goals had also been emphasized in the report.

13. Notable progress had been made in measuring the impact of culture on sustainable development, as was reflected in the roll-out of the UNESCO Culture 2030 Indicators in several countries and the first data release related to the global indicator for target 11.4 of Goal 11, on strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

14. Looking ahead, UNESCO called for culture to be positioned as a global public good and to be made a development goal in its own right in the post-2030 agenda. It also advocated renewed commitment to sustainable financing for culture as a lever for inclusive and sustainable development.

15. **Mr. Hanif** (Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Development cooperation with middle-income countries" (A/78/224), said that in the report, the Secretary-General had presented an analysis of the specific challenges faced by middle-income countries in addressing the environmental dimension of sustainable development. The report had been submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/215, in which the Assembly had stipulated that the report should include the results of a mapping exercise on the current support available to middle-income countries from the United Nations development system.

16. Middle-income countries, which accounted for approximately 30 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) and some 75 per cent of the world's population, were pivotal to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. However, multiple crises had reversed years of progress and millions more people were living in poverty than prior to the pandemic. Middle-income countries faced a common set of challenges: the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis triggered by surging inflation, increased food insecurity as a consequence of the war in Ukraine and the heavy toll exacted by climate change. Monetary policy tightening to combat inflation in advanced economies had triggered capital outflows and currency depreciations, leading to increasing balance-of-payment pressures, higher debt-servicing costs and heightened risks to debt sustainability. In many middle-income countries, growing public debt burdens were progressively crowding out investments in the Goals and climate action.

17. In his report, the Secretary-General had called for immediate action by the international community. Proposals included the establishment of debt workout mechanisms and greater use of debt-for-Sustainable Development Goals or debt-for-climate swaps and risk-sharing debt instruments. Efforts were also needed to find comprehensive, structural solutions to sovereign debt challenges, including through long-overdue reforms of the international debt architecture. The Secretary-General's proposed stimulus for the Goals contained specific measures to address those issues.

18. Middle-income countries needed to embark on just and inclusive green transitions in tandem with international efforts, led by high-income countries, to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. Transitions should include moving towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns and towards a digital, knowledge-based economy. Most middle-income countries required significant support for such transitions, including through financing, technology transfer and capacity-building. Multilateral development banks were well placed to provide such support, along with the United Nations system. A major portion of the financing should be long-term and highly concessional.

19. The mapping of current United Nations support to middle-income countries showed that the United Nations development system worked closely with those countries and had improved the tailoring and coherence of its support in recent years. Approximately 60 per cent of the United Nations development system entities which had responded to a survey sent in order to conduct the mapping exercise had a specific strategy for middle-income countries; all but one used indices that went beyond gross national income (GNI) per capita; and most used frameworks for countries in special situations in addition to entity-specific frameworks. The most frequently mentioned tools were modelling tools, followed by needs assessments and scenario analyses for the Goals, and the human development index and Multidimensional Poverty Index.

20. International development cooperation must be informed by a systematic assessment of middle-income countries' development gaps, vulnerabilities and resource-mobilization capability, in view of the multidimensional sustainable development challenges that those countries faced. The international community should continue to pursue new approaches that went beyond GDP, including a multidimensional vulnerability index. The Department for Economic and Social Affairs stood ready to support the deliberations of the Committee on the topic.

21. **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on agenda item 15 and agenda item 19 and its sub-items (a), (b) and (c).

22. **Mr. Guevara Rodríguez** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that

information and communications technology (ICT) had been a driving force for good: it had expanded learning opportunities, facilitated skill-development, improved access to health care, increased financial inclusion, enhanced agricultural productivity and strengthened disaster monitoring and coordination during emergencies. However, developing countries' use of ICT had been limited by a lack of infrastructure, computer capacity, human resources and expertise. Developing countries did not have equal access to emerging technologies and the benefits of rapid digitalization, although they needed them to attain higher levels of development. Worldwide, 2.7 billion people were still without Internet access. Enhanced international cooperation, including technology transfer and capacity-building, were needed to bridge the digital divide. Important areas for digital cooperation included an inclusive digital economy; Internet content tailored to local specificities and needs, including linguistic needs; access to digital networks and connectivity; capacity-building and technology transfer on favourable terms; investment in digital infrastructure; data protection; data governance; artificial intelligence; the prevention of Internet division and fragmentation; responses to disinformation and misinformation; and shared principles for a digital future for all.

23. The United Nations had a key role to play in advancing more balanced global data governance, which should entail special attention to the poorest and most vulnerable countries. Access to ICT should be universal, equitable, non-discriminatory and affordable. Tangible efforts would be needed to support the achievement of an inclusive, people-centred and development-oriented information society, in line with the vision reaffirmed at the recent Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Group of 77 and China. The Group looked forward to constructive negotiations on the global digital compact, which must address the structural impediments that developing countries faced in accessing new and emerging technologies.

24. Globalization had created both new opportunities and new challenges related to economic growth, development and poverty eradication. Much remained to be done to establish an equitable global trade system that would enable all countries and people to benefit from globalization. International cooperation was needed to reduce inequalities through trade and development, while respecting every country's policy space. The international community must reaffirm its commitment to creating an enabling environment for development and facilitating the means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In that connection, all actors, and particularly developed countries, must make good on their global commitments. A reinvigorated multilateral system, with the United Nations at its centre, was the foundation of more inclusive and sustainable globalization.

25. Science, technology and innovation were important catalysts for sustainable growth and the implementation of both the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Importantly, there was an urgent need to identify ways and means to address the diverse development needs of middle-income countries. The Group urged the international community to work collectively to address the many challenges posed by globalization.

26. **Mr. Dhungel** (Nepal), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that since the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, rapid technological change had dramatically affected societies, economies and governance. Economic transformation and enhanced productivity were largely based on ICT, science and innovation. ICT could improve the quality and delivery of public services such as health care and education, help to bridge economic and educational disparities, combat the climate crisis, achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and prevent and control pandemics. However, access to cutting edge technology was highly unequal. While developed countries were phasing out older networks and adopting 5G, low-income countries had to work with 2G and 3G networks because of the barriers to 5G deployment, which included prohibitive infrastructure and device costs, unreliable electricity, and regulatory and adopting constraints. The digital divide was widening: only some 36 per cent of the population in the least developed countries used the Internet, compared with a global rate of 66 per cent. In addition to the lack of Internet access, there was a lack of digital literacy training.

27. ICT could play a transformative role in helping the least developed countries to address some of their most significant challenges. Access to knowledge and technology, and to opportunities to contribute to science, technology and innovation, must therefore be improved, including through strengthened technology transfer. In line with the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, the least developed countries urged development partners, including the United Nations development system, to support them to significantly improve their science, technology and innovation infrastructure and innovation capacities by 2031; ensure universal and affordable Internet access in all the least developed countries by 2030; facilitate the expansion of broadband connectivity in the least developed countries; foster investment in micro, small-

and medium-sized enterprises that facilitated access to the Internet and digital services; promote the least developed countries' productive capacity and competitiveness through technology-driven entrepreneurship; and develop digital innovation ecosystems in the least developed countries that were fit-for-purpose and resilient against potential future pandemics.

28. Marginalized and remote communities in the least developed countries should not be forced to play the role of spectators in the digital age; they should be given equal access to digital tools, services and information in order to enable them to contribute to and benefit from the global digital ecosystem. The negotiations on the global digital compact should be aimed at enabling individuals, communities and nations to realize their full potential, fostering sustainable development and improving people's quality of life. The digital future must be inclusive and equitable.

29. **Mr. Wallace** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that many CARICOM States had economies that were overly reliant on a few industries, making them vulnerable to external shocks and limiting productivity. ICT had the potential to transform the subregion, including by strengthening various sectors, which could be pivotal for its sustainable development. The region thus attached great importance to ICT development. The COVID-19 pandemic and the escalation of global conflicts and crises had exacerbated deficiencies in education, health care and other public services, highlighting the need for resilient ICT infrastructure.

30. The populations of the small island developing States suffered disproportionately from non-communicable diseases and mental health conditions. Mammoth steps must be taken to improve those countries' health-care systems if they were to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3, on health, and ICT could help to create more robust and resilient health-care systems that could directly benefit women and girls. In that connection, it was fundamental to harness ICT to improve education, training and health care in order to empower women, girls and marginalized groups.

31. Investing in advanced early warning systems, real-time data collection and communication networks could save lives and minimize the impact of disasters on small island developing States. CARICOM thus fully supported the work of the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to ensure that more lives and livelihoods would be saved through early warning systems by the end of 2027. CARICOM equally appreciated the efforts of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to bridge the digital divide, which remained significant, with 2.7 billion people globally still not connected in 2022. Aware of the risks posed by cyberconflict, CARICOM continued to advocate for resources and training to protect the digital domains of its members. Robust policies were needed to strengthen cybersecurity and empower small nations to safeguard their digital sectors.

32. While globalization had brought tremendous benefits to many, it had also created and exacerbated deep imbalances. CARICOM faced an increasingly competitive global environment and was exposed to increased risks, but remained unprotected by the indifferent financial architecture. The differentiated impacts of globalization necessitated increased cooperation and development support. There was an urgent need for support to leverage science, technology and innovation, including frontier technologies, for a resilient post-pandemic recovery and as building blocks for sustainable economic growth and diversification. International investment in capacity-building and technology transfer were needed to strengthen national and regional systems and enable the region to adapt to rapid technological progress. As a subregion, CARICOM had a unique identity and history, and it attached great importance to harnessing culture as a strategic sector for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In that connection, it had supported the calls for the establishment of a repository of cultural identity, knowledge and traditions for the small island developing States, as a means of enhancing collaboration between them.

33. In view of the manifold impediments to sustainable development that developing countries must contend with, development cooperation must prioritize countries' diverse needs and include tailored, coherent support. The multidimensional vulnerability index must be used, the global financial architecture reformed and a dedicated debt-treatment mechanism established. CARICOM remained steadfast in its commitment to transformational change, and would work with all stakeholders to realize its vision of a more prosperous and inclusive Caribbean region.

34. **Ms. Motsumi** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, said that ICT had a valuable role to play in tackling the structural challenges that landlocked developing countries faced: it improved efficiency, facilitated access to global value chains and generated economic and social benefits. The growth of ICT and related industries would enhance economic diversification and restructuring. Nevertheless, considerable challenges,

including infrastructure gaps, high costs of access and use, limited skills, inadequate regulation and an unsupportive environment, prevented landlocked developing countries from fully benefiting from the potential of ICT. In addition, landlocked developing countries depended on neighbouring coastal countries for access to undersea cables and international Internet bandwidths, which had a huge impact on cost.

35. The current pace of evolution of digital technology was unprecedented, and the COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated its potential to enhance resilience in the face of crisis: as societies were locked down, the Internet and digital advances had kept people connected and societies functioning. However, progress had been uneven, with stark inequalities between and within countries, across genders and between rural and urban populations. On a positive note, ICT connectivity in landlocked developing countries had improved over the past decade, although not enough to meet people's needs.

36. Innovations in robotics, artificial intelligence, the Internet of things and big data held enormous potential for promoting human well-being and advancing progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. With the right policies in place, ICT could drive structural economic transformation, reduce trade and transit costs and facilitate the integration of landlocked developing countries into the global economy. International cooperation was paramount to support universal connectivity, and the landlocked developing countries urged development partners, transit countries, relevant United Nations agencies and the private sector to support ICT connectivity and to facilitate technology transfer, knowledge-sharing and capacity-building. The level of investment in digital infrastructure must be multiplied to enable landlocked developing countries to leverage e-learning, e-governance and e-commerce. It was also necessary to enhance cybersecurity and protect critical digital infrastructure, in view of the surge in misinformation, hate speech and related challenges resulting from the misuse of digital tools.

37. Lastly, in the lead-up to the negotiations on the next programme of action for the landlocked developing countries, the international community should seize the opportunity offered by the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries to take urgent, collective action to ensure that those countries were not left behind, but were at the forefront of the digital revolution.

38. **Mr. Pérez Ayestarán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, said that although globalization offered opportunities, its benefits were distributed unequally, resulting in a deepening of the gaps between the countries of the North and those of the global South. In order to ensure that no one was left behind, it was necessary to immediately implement international sustainable development agreements, including those related to international cooperation and development financing. It was equally essential to correct the existing grave economic imbalances, promote foreign debt relief and redress the reduction in foreign direct investment and official development assistance. Revitalized and genuinely inclusive multilateralism was needed.

39. The international community must urgently build a new economic order that was truly fair, equitable and inclusive and based on the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and the rules of international law. As a starting point, it must make progress on the reform of the international financial architecture. The current multifaceted crisis could never be overcome without meaningful progress on the long-awaited reform of the Bretton Woods institutions. The United Nations, and a revitalized, transparent and inclusive multilateralism, geared towards promoting international peace, security and development, had a fundamental role in tackling the challenges posed by globalization. It was also essential to establish a multilateral trade system that was rules-based, transparent, inclusive, non-discriminatory and equitable, which could effectively contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Group of Friends rejected unilateral, protectionist trade practices that served to advance the national interests of only a few countries, to the detriment of the functioning of multilateral organizations and the global responses to the challenges facing the international community.

40. In a globalized, interconnected world, unilateral coercive measures had an impact not only on the nations subject to them, but on the world economy as a whole, as well as on supply chains and food and energy security. Such illegal measures disrupted the market order, threatened multilateralism and hampered global trade, investment and development. They would continue to cause human suffering around the world unless they were fully and immediately brought to an end, which would enable all nations to fully realize their productive potential and thereby contribute to global solutions to the current problems.

41. The Group of Friends would strengthen its efforts in pursuit of a new international economic order, promote and defend the vitality of the Charter of the

United Nations and continue to support mechanisms for poverty and inequality reduction.

42. **Mr. Muhamad** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that, while the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic was in the past, numerous challenges remained, including geopolitical tensions, macroeconomic uncertainty, food and energy insecurity and the climate crisis. Cooperation was the foundation for continued resilience and growth, and ASEAN was determined to strengthen its capacity to respond to those challenges, while seizing opportunities for growth.

43. ASEAN was working to enhance digital cooperation, including through negotiations on a new digital economy framework agreement for the region, which was aimed at strengthening connectivity and enabling people and businesses to make the most of the digital ecosystem. It would pursue the implementation of the ASEAN Digital Master plan 2025 and its regional cybersecurity cooperation strategy. ASEAN member States would continue to engage constructively in the discussions on the global digital compact and would work for the adoption of a compact that promoted digital inclusion, innovation and interoperability and accelerated the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

44. ASEAN had taken measures to tackle the existential challenges of climate change and food and energy insecurity. In September 2023, it had adopted a regional carbon neutrality strategy, which provided a pathway for an accelerated transition towards a low-carbon future and a green transformation. It was committed to ensuring sustainable energy security, including through the ASEAN power grid. ASEAN was also working to address food insecurity by improving the productivity of its agrifood systems and ensuring the unimpeded trade of food products, including through various regional initiatives and plans. ASEAN would continue to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and would seek to leverage the Summit of the Future to build momentum.

45. No nation could solve transboundary problems alone. Member States must continue to advance partnerships, and ASEAN remained dedicated to boosting regional and external cooperation to bolster economic resilience, including by strengthening digital sectors with a view to consolidating the region's role as a growth hub.

46. **Ms. Hamdouni** (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Like-Minded Group of Countries Supporters of Middle-Income Countries, said that the Group appreciated the mapping exercise conducted by the Secretariat of the current support available to middle-income countries, as well as the cooperation of the United Nations development system and its efforts to improve the tailoring and coherence of its support to middle-income countries. The challenges those countries faced were multidimensional and could not be measured using income-based criteria alone. The Group thus reiterated its call for a review of development cooperation with middle-income countries and for a shift towards a more inclusive, fair approach. It was important to explore measures for helping middle-income countries to leverage financing for the Sustainable Development Goals, including global initiatives such as proposed stimulus for the Goals, the reform of the international financial architecture and the development of integrated national financing frameworks.

47. The Group called on all United Nations entities, funds and programmes to further align their activities with the priorities of middle-income countries through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and encouraged the funds and programmes to develop dedicated strategies to support middle-income countries, including to leverage and mobilize sustainable development financing. It likewise called for the mapping exercise to be used as the basis for an inter-agency system-wide response plan for facilitating development cooperation in accordance with middle-income countries' specific challenges and diverse needs. In addition, more coherent support was needed to help middle-income countries to forge partnerships, support innovation and foster South-South and triangular cooperation. The regional economic commissions had a crucial role in that regard.

48. Morocco, as Chair of the Group, would host the first interregional conference for middle-income countries in Marrakech in 2024.

49. **Mr. Mira Ramirez** (El Salvador) said that the current crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, had reaffirmed the value and catalysing role of science, technology and innovation; digital technologies; and digital development in addressing multidimensional challenges. His Government considered an enabling environment to be a necessary precondition for ongoing cooperation with stakeholders to achieve the best results for national development. In order to reduce gaps and foster equal access to the benefits of science, technology and innovation, and of the digital transformation, there was a need for increased investment in inclusive and accessible digital infrastructure, better digital literacy training and improved technology transfer and capacity-building, particularly for developing countries.

50. In recent years El Salvador had embarked on an ambitious digital transformation. It had established an Innovation Ministry; developed its digital infrastructure and harnessed new and emerging technologies for the provision and transformation of government and economic services; established regulatory frameworks to enhance digital security; and taken measures to close the digital divide and increase Internet access. The Government had recently approved a legal framework aimed at making better national use of digital technologies and innovation; in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it had made progress on enabling Internet access in public spaces; and a few weeks earlier it had finalized an agreement with Google to digitalize government services.

51. In order to close the existing financing gaps, there was a need for decisive action, including urgent responses to the specific problems that prevented middle-income countries from accessing financing on favourable terms. The Committee should take specific measures to adopt a broader understanding of development that would make it possible to measure each country's development gaps, multidimensional vulnerabilities and the unique challenges faced by middle-income countries. A framework that went beyond GDP to allocate resources more fairly would significantly improve the response to those countries' needs.

52. **Ms. Ríos Serna** (Colombia) said that her Government was committed to ensuring that every citizen had access to the digital tools and resources necessary to prosper in the digital age. It had set a target of having 85 per cent of the population connected to the Internet by the end of 2026, which would also facilitate public service provision and a government presence in all the regions of the country. That connectivity goal could be achieved only with the use of new technologies and a substantial increase in investment in infrastructure. International cooperation, including the provision of financing, technology transfer and capacity-building, would also play a determining role. With support, developing countries could harness the digital economy to create opportunities for everyone, especially those in vulnerable situations, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Capacity-building for the use of digital tools and platforms would require an inclusive and intersectional approach in order to leave no one behind. The design and operation of such tools and platforms should be accessible, inclusive, supportive and respectful of traditional knowledge and practices, and transformative, in order to close the digital gender gap.

53. The digital environment should be a free, safe space where the protection of human rights was prioritized. There was a collective responsibility to take steps, including designing legal and regulatory frameworks, to protect all people, and in particular women and girls, through the elimination of gender-based violence and child abuse. In that same vein, it was essential to make sure that emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, did not perpetuate discrimination. Colombia would continue to contribute to the discussions on the global digital compact, which provided an opportunity to address those issues.

54. Middle-income countries continued to face multidimensional challenges that prevented them from overcoming development obstacles. Although they made substantial investments to contribute to global sustainable development, climate action and biodiversity conservation objectives, they remained without priority access to concessional financing and had limited public spending capacity as a result of the global macroeconomic situation. It was thus imperative to take urgent steps to redefine the criteria used for granting access to concessional financing: they must be replaced by multidimensional criteria that went beyond GDP. In the run-up to the Summit of the Future, it was important to form a group of experts, with the support of the Statistical Commission, to make progress on the proposal of the Secretary-General to identify a set of multidimensional indicators that could serve as the basis for intergovernmental discussions.

55. **Ms. Babikyan** (Armenia) said that Armenia supported the development of the global digital compact, as well as the Secretary-General's recent proposal of establishing a high-level advisory board on artificial intelligence. Armenia had a long history of using ICT and digital technologies to promote economic inclusion and improve public governance, education and its citizens' quality of life. Her Government was integrating science, technology and innovation into national development strategies, creating an enabling environment for the ICT industry and strengthening links with the private sector to facilitate coordinated action. A number of multinational ICT companies maintained operations in Armenia.

56. With a consortium of private companies, her Government had established an "engineering city" in Yerevan, aimed at empowering and attracting new technology companies and accelerating the development of complex engineering solutions. Armenia also had an attractive ecosystem for start-ups, with more than 20 start-ups having received a total of $700 million in investments over the past two years. Her country had made significant progress in promoting women's

participation in ICT and related fields; women currently accounted for 44 per cent of the information technology workforce in Armenia.

57. ICT and science, technology and innovation, as tools to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, were especially important for middle-income countries. The mapping exercise on current support available to middle-income countries had highlighted those countries' vulnerabilities and the need for urgent actions within the United Nations system and beyond. Armenia attached the utmost importance to the development and introduction of a comprehensive set of criteria for measuring development that went beyond GDP.

58. **Ms. Jalili** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the development of a new generation of technologies, exemplified by cloud computing, artificial intelligence and big data, was further widening the digital divide between developed and developing countries. The divide was further exacerbated by inward-looking policies, protectionist approaches and unilateral measures. The World Summit on the Information Society had been held to address the challenge of the digital divide, but it had failed. Multilateral action, including capacity-building, was critical. Developed countries should fulfil their commitments to providing the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda, without politicizing the process. The United Nations, and ITU in particular, had a pivotal role in enhancing international and regional cooperation and ensuring that developing countries benefited from capacity-building. Developed countries had also failed to fulfil their commitments under the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, according to which developing countries should have had the opportunity to participate in Internet governance policymaking.

59. Private companies, including social media platforms, should observe the rules, norms and policies of the countries in which they operated, and should be held accountable for their behaviour in the digital environment. States should consider ways and means of holding companies accountable for any extraterritorial impacts of their behaviour and should exercise due control over ICT companies and platforms under their jurisdiction. In that regard, States must not use ICT to further economic, political or any other kind of coercive measures, including by taking limiting and blocking measures against targeted States. The United Nations must make meaningful progress on the still unfulfilled mandate of the Tunis Agenda as it related to enhanced cooperation. The global digital compact should complement those efforts by allowing each nation to determine its own digital development model and

formulate connectivity and access policies. Closing the digital divide was critical to harnessing the full potential of ICT for sustainable development.

60. **Ms. Curzio Vila** (Mexico) said that science, technology and innovation were catalysts for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and crucial for building adaptation and resilience capacities. The international community should foster open and inclusive cooperation and encourage knowledge-sharing, technology transfer and access to digital public goods. Synergies should be created between multilateral organizations, development agencies, the private sector and other stakeholders with a view to strengthening digital, science, technology and innovation capacities worldwide. International efforts should be complemented by national policies promoting learning and innovation. The Technology Facilitation Mechanism played an important role in strengthening national capacities to promote access to science, technology and innovation.

61. Given the digital divide and inequalities in the dissemination of technology, there was a clear need to optimize resources for the benefit of all. Priorities for her country included closing structural gaps, in particular the gender gap; eliminating obstacles to the full, effective and equal participation of women both offline and in digital contexts; increasing the equal, safe and affordable access of women and girls to digital technologies, ICT and the Internet and to education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and enhancing their digital literacy. As Co-Chair of the Group of Friends on Digital Technologies, Mexico would continue to advocate for an ambitious and inclusive global digital compact that maximized the potential of digital technologies and mitigated their risks with a view to achieving global technological development that was ethical, fair and equitable.

62. Culture contributed to social inclusion, job creation, high-quality education, health and the empowerment of women and girls. The international community had a collective responsibility to lay the groundwork for the inclusion of culture as a global public good in the development agenda beyond 2030.

63. **Mr. Cruz** (Angola) said that the rapid development of ICT was increasingly important for promoting sustainable development and building a more equitable, democratic and inclusive world. Countries had been using ICT to improve the quality of national public services and bring State entities closer to their constituencies. E-commerce had been a catalyst for economic development and enhanced international cooperation.

64. At the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Group of 77 and China held in Havana in September 2023, the role of science, technology and innovation and ways to strengthen South-South cooperation had been discussed. Members of the Group had urged international institutions to make additional efforts to support nations of the global South in using science, technology and innovation to make progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. They had called for greater representation of the global South in the international governance system and had recognized the importance of South-South cooperation as a complement to, but not a substitute for, broader cooperation, including with the North.

65. For his Government, strengthening the national ICT system was crucial for economic diversification, increased productivity, economic growth, global competitiveness and the digital and green transitions. At an international forum on ICT held in Angola in June 2023, the President of Angola had stated that ICT was a lever for the technological modernization of the industrial sector, which was needed to foster economic and social growth. His Government had redoubled efforts to ensure trust in and the security of service networks, with a focus on protecting critical infrastructure and vital information services and promoting the free, secure and efficient use of cyberspace.

66. **Mr. Shaker** (Saudi Arabia) said that the world was seeing rapid innovations in artificial intelligence, machine learning and quantum computing. His country expressed its appreciation for the efforts by United Nations agencies to keep up with those unprecedented developments, as detailed in the report of the Secretary-General on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels (A/78/62–E/2023/49).

67. Saudi Arabia was working tirelessly to bring about a qualitative digital leap at all levels. It was a founding member of the Digital Cooperation Organization, which brought together the ministries of communications of its member States to empower youth, women and entrepreneurs. At the current session of the General Assembly, Saudi Arabia had co-launched – along with Bahrain, Cyprus, Pakistan and Rwanda – the United Nations Group of Friends for Digital Cooperation. The Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority had just signed an agreement with ITU to finance the creation of global artificial intelligence readiness frameworks. Saudi Arabia was also working with the World Bank's Digital Development Partnership programme to help devise digital development strategies for least developed and middle-income countries.

68. *Ms. Hsieh (Thailand), Vice-Chair, took the Chair*.

69. **Ms. Gantana** (Namibia) said that her country joined other middle-income countries in urging the adoption of a comprehensive system for measuring progress that went beyond GDP. Her Government had given priority to that initiative in line with its firm belief that improved metrics of well-being were paramount for all countries, irrespective of their level of development.

70. A systematic assessment of middle-income countries was critical for effective international development cooperation. Such an assessment should include the identification of development gaps; the disaggregation of data to enable clear classification of inequality levels within countries; information on economic inequalities, to deepen understanding of how GDP growth was distributed within countries; an analysis of investments in education, health care and skills development and of the effectiveness of social safety nets; and an examination of the state of physical infrastructure and technological capabilities. It was also important to understand how a country fit into the broader regional and global context, considering geopolitical dynamics, trade relationships and participation in international agreements and organizations. A comprehensive assessment would enable international development partners to gain a more holistic understanding of the development landscape of middle-income countries, which would facilitate the formulation of more tailored and effective development strategies and interventions.

71. Her delegation was grateful to the Secretary-General for his recognition of the need for additional support for middle-income countries to help them leverage financing for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Namibia supported the stimulus for the Goals, the reform of the international financial architecture and the development of integrated national financing frameworks.

72. **Ms. Rubio** (Dominican Republic) said that ICT should be leveraged to address the environmental, social and economic challenges facing the global community. ICT offered unprecedented opportunities for education and training, and could therefore contribute directly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Digital inclusion and access to online information were crucial for ensuring that no one was left behind. Her Government remained committed to investing in digital infrastructure and capacity-building programmes to empower communities and close the digital divide.

73. ICT played an essential role in the management and preservation of natural resources. In recent years, her Government had improved governance and combated corruption by digitizing government processes and encouraging online participation. The digital divide must be addressed to ensure that everyone benefited from ICT. International cooperation was key to ensuring that all developing countries had access to the most modern and innovative technologies.

74. The Dominican Republic was committed to using ICT in a responsible and equitable manner with a view to building a more prosperous, fair and sustainable world. All countries should join in the global effort to harness the transformative potential of ICT for the well-being of all.

75. **Ms. Kavaleuskaya** (Belarus) said that her delegation agreed that the support mechanisms of the United Nations system and other partners needed to be adapted to the specific development needs of middle-income countries, including in the areas of climate change, food security and resource mobilization. The sustainable development challenges facing middle-income countries were multidimensional and could not be measured by income-based indicators alone. A more individualized approach and indicators that went beyond GDP were needed.

76. Immediate and systemic reforms of the existing financial architecture and development cooperation paradigm should be implemented with a view to developing long-term solutions to ensure the right to development and building capacity to mobilize financial resources. Industrial innovation, international investment and the integration of science and technology into national production systems were crucial for the economic growth and competitiveness of middle-income countries, the development of their private sectors and their integration into the global economy. Middle-income countries also required enhanced international technical support and partnerships that prevented the abuse of donor status based on political preferences.

77. Middle-income countries were the only group of countries that did not have a strategic cooperation document with the United Nations system. That problem could be resolved through the development of a comprehensive United Nations action plan for cooperation with middle-income countries. Unfortunately, that issue had not been addressed in the report of the Secretary-General on development cooperation with middle-income countries (A/78/224), despite the request in General Assembly resolution 76/215. That important issue should be reflected in the draft resolution on development cooperation with middle-income countries to be considered during the current session.

78. **Mr. Barro** (Burkina Faso) said that, by investing in emerging technologies, countries would be better able to anticipate crises and devise innovative solutions to address them. ICT had the potential to revolutionize approaches to problems and accelerate the development of economies. Advances such as the digitalization of services, artificial intelligence and the Internet of things offered opportunities to improve the well-being of people and promote equitable and inclusive development. However, such progress had always been unequal, with developing countries left far behind in terms of access to communication services.

79. With a view to harnessing digital and emerging technologies as drivers of socioeconomic development, his Government was endeavouring to increase investment in science education, to create an environment conducive to innovation by building infrastructure, to support the dissemination of technologies in areas such as health, agriculture and renewable energy, and to facilitate collaboration between research institutes and companies. The national digital economy development strategy for the period 2018–2027 was aimed at mainstreaming digital technologies in all aspects of economic and social life. As a result of such efforts, more than 75 per cent of the population had Internet access, and the use of electronic payment tools had increased. However, more needed to be done to ensure nationwide coverage, reduce Internet connection costs and increase the use of digital services.

80. The international community should work together to overcome global challenges to sustainable development by promoting the sharing of knowledge and technology. All Member States should endeavour to incorporate science and technology into their national development policies.

81. **Mr. Zhao** Haibo (China) said that ICT was developing rapidly, and interconnectedness and mutual dependence among countries was increasing. At the same time, unilateralism and protectionism were running rampant, and the North-South gap and the digital divide had become more prominent. The international community must urgently scale up open cooperation in science, technology and innovation to promote stronger, greener and healthier global development. Joint efforts were needed to create an open, fair, just and non-discriminatory environment for scientific and technological development. The bridging of the digital divide must be accelerated to ensure that no country and no one was left behind in the digital

transformation. Strengthened governance of emerging technologies and more equitable international rules were needed.

82. A new technological revolution featuring artificial intelligence was under way. Its impact on economic globalization and human development would be profound. The international community should seek to establish relevant rules and standards that struck a balance between the interests of all countries and ensured that the benefits of emerging technologies were shared equitably among the people of all countries. True multilateralism should be practised, and the building of an open world economy promoted. The international community should reject the practices of delinking and disrupting supply chains and building walls and barriers, and oppose unilateral sanctions and extreme pressure, with a view to steering the development of the international economy in a more equitable and reasonable direction and creating a favourable external environment for developing countries.

83. China actively supported the central role of the United Nations in global digital governance. China had hosted the World Internet Conference and had launched a global data security initiative that provided a platform for global Internet governance with a view to building a community with a shared future in cyberspace. China would continue to deliver on the Belt and Road Initiative and to support global development initiatives.

84. **Ms. Ching** (Singapore) said that consistent and concerted efforts, among and within countries, were needed to minimize the risks of digitalization while maximizing its benefits. To ensure digital inclusivity, gains from digitalization must be shared equitably.

85. Her Government was equipping its people with digital access, literacy and skills. Singaporeans were encouraged to embrace digital learning as a lifelong pursuit. Singapore had launched a digital forum to help small States to build their digital capacity. Her Government had developed a digital connectivity blueprint in which it had outlined its strategic priorities for digital infrastructure over the coming decade. A national artificial intelligence strategy had been launched, and artificial intelligence had been leveraged to address pressing challenges related to health, climate and food security.

86. Governance of the digital commons must be strengthened on the basis of a shared set of principles. ASEAN had launched negotiations on a region-wide digital economy agreement, with a view to facilitating interoperable digital economy systems, cross-border data flows and digital trade.

87. Her delegation supported the initiative of the Secretary-General for a global digital compact, which would present an opportunity to build an open and inclusive global digital architecture. Such a compact should serve to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals by providing universal Internet access and connectivity by 2030, enhancing capacity-building for small States and developing countries, and developing a global innovation platform to find digital solutions for real-world problems.

88. **Ms. Pg Ibrahim** (Brunei Darussalam) said that the digital divide persisted, with 2.7 billion people still offline. Her Government remained committed to using ICT to support its multidimensional approach to sustainable development. Through its digital economy master plan, her Government was striving to create a digital and future-ready society and a vibrant and sustainable economy. Several industries and government sectors were undergoing a digital transformation fuelled by the wide adoption of the Internet across Brunei. The rapid development of ICT had improved health-care services, enhanced the economy and created new capabilities in education.

89. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health had introduced a public mobile application to control the spread of the pandemic through contact tracing. The application had since been expanded to allow users to make medical appointments, have video health consultations and access personal health records. The application had received an inclusion and community services award from the Asia-Pacific ICT Alliance.

90. Bridging the digital divide was a strategic investment in her country's future. As part of the Digital for All initiative, older persons had received lessons on basic ICT skills, including e-commerce, online banking and cybersecurity. Her Government continued to invest in the expansion of network infrastructure and innovative solutions to connect low-income families in rural and remote areas. The digitalized national welfare system launched in 2020 provided a more accessible application process for those in need of financial assistance. Joint funding schemes were offered to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to support them in applying digital solutions to enhance their productivity and efficiency.

91. **Ms. Gahlot** (India) said that existing strengths in ICT must be leveraged to make faster progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Digitalization had the potential to bridge gaps in the delivery of public services, in particular education and primary health care. The India Stack had much to offer

in that regard. Its open application programming interface meant that its principles, technologies and functionality could be applied in any country.

92. During its presidency of the Group of 20, India had emphasized the need to invest in safe, secure, trusted, accountable and inclusive digital public infrastructure, particularly in the global South. Her Government was planning to build a global repository of digital public infrastructure for members of the Group of 20 and other countries. India had also proposed forming an alliance with the aim of providing technical assistance and adequate funding for the implementation of digital public infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries. Digital skilling, upskilling and reskilling would also be required to ensure that no one was left behind in information societies.

93. Given that science, technology and innovation played an important role in addressing the developmental challenges faced by countries of the global South, developed countries should be more forthcoming in providing funding for research and transferring technology to developing countries on the basis of their national priorities and policies. A unique challenge faced by most developing countries was striking a balance between using science, technology and innovation for the modernization of their economies and protecting their cultural heritage and traditions. As a linguistically and culturally diverse country, India placed a high priority on the full recognition and protection of culture and saw its intrinsic value as a driver for the achievement of the Goals. Diversity was a common factor for middle-income countries like India and created challenges for their development. India was working towards a transition from a linear to a circular economy, which was a key pillar of its Lifestyle for the Environment campaign.

94. **Mr. Alkhuraibet** (Kuwait) said that ICT was crucial to accelerating achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in a way that met modern needs without compromising the needs of future generations. In 2019, his country had established the Centre for Government Communication to enhance connectedness among government agencies. The Centre played a major role in mounting rapid responses to emerging crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

95. Unfortunately, half of the world's population did not have adequate access to new technologies. That included disadvantaged groups in the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. Kuwait was committed to creating an inclusive global digital society. It had been a member of ITU since 1959 and was on the ITU Council for the 2023–2026 period. In the coming decades, ICT would be increasingly important to managing and monitoring energy systems.

96. **Mr. Adenopo** (Nigeria) said that his Government had made a commitment to invest an additional 20 per cent in digital infrastructure and literacy programmes compared with the previous year. Its aim was to bring Internet connectivity to an additional 10 million Nigerians, with a focus on rural and underserved communities. Given the need for continual adaptation to rapid technological advancements, his Government was in the process of revising its national digital strategy to bring it into line with the 2030 Agenda.

97. Nigeria was committed to fostering South-South cooperation and had recently entered into partnerships with other middle-income countries, including Brazil and India, to share best practices in sustainable agriculture. As a member of the African Continental Free Trade Area, Nigeria had successfully increased its intra-African trade volume by 15 per cent, contributing to regional GDP growth of 4 per cent. Its commitment to the Free Trade Area had led to the creation of more than 50,000 jobs, largely in sustainable industries. In addition, his Government had launched a programme to foster innovation and entrepreneurship across the continent that had already attracted $300 million in investments.

98. Challenges related to the digital divide, sustainable development and global interdependence required actionable, measurable initiatives. In the lead-up to the World Summit on the Information Society in 2024, the international community should adopt a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to address those issues.

99. **Ms. Alatawi** (Bahrain) said that her country had been integrating digital infrastructure into its national programmes even since adopting its Economic Vision 2030 plan. During the 2019–2022 period, Bahrain had converted over 200 government services to electronic. It made sure to provide modern technological equipment in educational settings to encourage youth to develop digital skills. The introduction of its Cloud First policy in 2017 had reduced operating costs and had enhanced security and productivity in government agencies. All those advances had contributed to Bahrain being selected by Amazon Web Services as the hub of its first availability zone in the Middle East.

100. Bahrain had enacted a data protection law in 2018. Its National Cyber Security Centre monitored digital infrastructure security and had launched over 30 initiatives on information governance. With a view to bridging the digital divide in the Arab world and in

cooperation with UNDP and ITU, Bahrain had co-hosted the launch of the Digital for Sustainable Development Partnership on the margins of the current General Assembly session, and called on other States of the region to join that initiative. Bahrain had just assumed the presidency of the Digital Cooperation Organization and was an active member of ITU. In November 2023, Bahrain would be hosting the ITU Regional Development Forum for the Arab States.

101. **Mr. Hossain** (Bangladesh) said that, as part of a vision to harness the benefits of the digital revolution for sustainable development, his Government was investing heavily in digital infrastructure, Internet access and more accessible and affordable digital services. In collaboration with UNDP, his Government was facilitating the digitalization of public services, financial and digital inclusion, public service delivery and data-driven policymaking.

102. Digital, knowledge and broadband divides persisted among and within countries. Nearly 43 per cent of the population of developing countries had no Internet access. In the least developed countries, only 19 per cent of women used the Internet, compared with 31 per cent of men. The issues of access and affordability and other barriers to the use of ICT in countries in the global South needed to be urgently addressed. Those countries needed investment in digital infrastructure, affordable Internet access and assistance in research and development to benefit from artificial intelligence and the new data-driven wave of frontier technologies. Capacity-building in e-commerce, digital content creation and the marketing of digital products, goods and services could generate revenue and employment.

103. The global digital compact should streamline digital cooperation, bridge digital divides and provide a technology governance architecture that fostered innovation and growth, ensured inclusion and protected human rights. International cooperation was needed to prevent cyberattacks, protect data privacy and freedom of expression, and address illegal and harmful content online. South-South and triangular cooperation could play a complementary role in facilitating access to technology and the distribution of the benefits of the digital transformation. Exchange of knowledge, experiences and best practices through such cooperation could spur economic growth and advance sustainable development.

104. **Ms. Sahfiq** (Pakistan) said that the digital age presented both unparalleled opportunities and formidable challenges. ICT not only played a pivotal role in driving sustainable development, but could also bridge the chasms created by globalization.

Nevertheless, the digital divide remained a stark reality. For many, especially in the developing world, the benefits of the technological revolution remained elusive, with challenges persisting in infrastructure affordability and digital literacy.

105. Addressing the digital divide and the science, technology and innovation divide required investment in sustainable ICT infrastructure and scaled-up technology transfer and capacity-building. The intellectual property regime should be revisited, bearing in mind that intellectual property rights could be both enablers of and impediments to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Technologies that were essential for developing countries to achieve the Goals should be made global public goods. There was a need to explore how to better leverage initiatives such as open science, open-source technologies and digital goods. Objectives should be identified to guide scientific research with a view to helping developing countries to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Goals.

106. An international technology agreement that was aligned with the Goals was needed. Under such an agreement, developing countries should be offered preferential access to relevant advanced technologies, and discriminatory restrictions should be ended. Focus should be placed on supporting scientific breakthroughs that were essential to achieving the Goals and environmental objectives.

107. **Ms. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana) said that technologies such as artificial intelligence must be harnessed to advance development, and mechanisms must be put in place to address their harmful uses. The widening gap between the countries that were the sources of such innovations and those that were struggling to achieve even sustained, affordable access to the Internet also needed to be addressed. Efforts to address the gaps in access in developing countries must be renewed and intensified. Women and girls must not be excluded from full participation in scientific and technological processes.

108. Her Government was working to implement a legislative and regulatory framework that would accelerate digitalization and incorporate science, technology, engineering and mathematics education into school curricula. Guyana welcomed the efforts to resume the work of the Consortium on Science, Technology and Innovation for the South and to establish a scientific advisory board that would inform Member States of breakthroughs in science and technology.

109. In discussions on globalization and interdependence, balance was key. The primary goals must be to responsibly exploit the positive aspects of expanding trade, cross-border investments and strengthened human connections across cultures, while also addressing the inevitable imbalances in the ability of all States to compete on an even playing field in wide-open markets, as well as the issues of terrorism and cross-border organized crime. A more effective multilateral system and collaboration with partners in the private sector, academia and civil society were needed. The necessary changes must be made within the United Nations to address the inherent inequities and gaps.

110. **Ms. Chivundu** (Malawi) said that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, ICT had played an important role, for example by enabling the continued provision of education through e-learning. However, the pandemic had exposed the huge digital divide between developed and developing countries. Developing countries, including Malawi, had struggled to switch to virtual work owing to a lack of access to technology.

111. ICT had a critical role to play in addressing the impacts of climate change. The international community should strengthen early warning and early action systems and mechanisms through digitization, the modernization of Indigenous knowledge and the efficient dissemination of weather forecasts. Household and community resilience should be built through the adoption and financing of early warning gadgets, efficient energy technologies and climate-smart agriculture technologies.

112. In partnership with UNDP, her Government was launching an inclusive digital transformation project with the aim of improving digital governance and bridging the digital divide. Malawi was also partnering with the World Bank to address vital digital infrastructure requirements such as State-wide area networks, data centres and data-sharing.

113. All stakeholders should remain committed to accessibility, affordability and digital literacy with a view to bridging the digital divide and promoting socioeconomic development in every country, particularly those that lagged behind in terms of ICT. Countries were responsible for protecting the privacy and security of their citizens while fostering innovation and creativity. Sustainable practices that mitigated the carbon footprint of ICT should be adopted. Collaboration between Governments, industry leaders, civil society and academia was essential in crafting comprehensive policies that struck a balance between technological advancement and environmental responsibility.

114. **Mr. Aristov** (Russian Federation) said that progress in digitalization was being hindered by the growing digital divide. His Government was implementing capacity-building programmes through the United Nations development system to enhance the digital skills of young people in countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Africa.

115. Rapid scientific and technological progress carried the risk of increasing the technological dependence of countries of the global South and eroding their digital sovereignty. Such a risk was compounded by the growing threat of the monopolization of the ICT market, whereby the access of entire peoples to basic information resources lay in the hands of foreign private capital firms, which sometimes served the political interests of the countries under whose jurisdiction they operated. Demand was increasing for large technology companies to conduct themselves in a transparent and responsible manner. Attempts to regulate the digital economy must take into account the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises in addition to those of large ones.

116. His country supported the internationalization of the Internet on the basis of the universally recognized principles and norms of international law and the needs of people. Governments should play a central role in the Internet governance system, which should be free from the influence of any unilateral political restrictions or commercial interests and ensure the safety, integrity, continuity, stability, sustainability and security of that global critical infrastructure.

117. The recommendations made by the Secretary-General following the mapping of the current support available to middle-income countries were too general. Policy decisions on reducing the debt burden of those countries must be based on criteria that went beyond GDP. There was a lack of specific proposals on the introduction of new strategies and tools, or the more effective use of existing ones, to enable middle-income countries to access increased financial support and ensure their inclusive and sustained economic growth. The mapping was thus only a starting point in identifying the problems faced by middle-income countries and developing effective strategies for their development.

118. The idea that one group of countries was culturally superior to another had no place in the emerging multipolar world. Russia would continue to fund projects that integrated culture and sustainable development in Armenia, Belarus, Guinea, Zimbabwe,

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. No reference had been made to the impacts of unilateral coercive measures in the report of the Secretary-General on development cooperation with middle-income countries (A/78/224), despite the fact that some middle-income countries, including Belarus, Zimbabwe, Iran, Cuba and Nicaragua, were targeted by Western sanctions.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.