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Coordination segment

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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 1 February 2023, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Nasir (Vice-President) (Indonesia)

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In the absence of Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria), Mr. Nasir (Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 8: Coordination segment (continued)

Panel discussion: “Energy access and energy transition”

1. **The President** said that the discussion would address the interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy and other Goals, in particular Goal 13 on climate action, and would consider how the subsidiary bodies of the Council and the entities of the United Nations system, including specialized agencies, were working on accelerating progress towards achieving Goal 7.

2. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) had been working on harnessing the interlinkages between Goals 7, 8 and 9, while looking at the future of industrialization in a post-pandemic world. More information would be welcome on energy efficiency policies, technologies and practices that provided a low-carbon and low-emissions path towards growth, as the international community sought to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. **Mr. Zou** (Deputy to the Director General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)), panellist, speaking via video link, said that while industrialization was key for creating jobs and reducing poverty, it would have to follow a low-carbon and low-emission path in order to avoid future catastrophes. Sustainable Development Goals 7 and 9 were among the five Goals that would be under review at the upcoming high-level political forum on sustainable development, and the coordination segment provided a timely opportunity to examine the interlinkages between them. Although industry was a major consumer of energy, it was also a provider of innovation and solutions for energy transition in terms of energy savings and emission reduction products and technologies, such as electric batteries, electric cars, wind turbines and energy efficient appliances.

4. UNIDO would co-lead key activities in the run-up to the review of Goal 9 at the high-level political forum by supporting countries in their efforts to decouple industrialization from increases in greenhouse gas emissions and other environmentally harmful impacts. Decoupling could not be achieved without also addressing upstream linkages in energy systems and raw materials as factors of input in all manufacturing processes. Energy efficiency approaches were therefore

key to universal policy engagement and corporate initiatives in developing countries and economies in transition. Energy efficiency was the least costly option for the reduction of emissions by countries and businesses, since firms could reduce their emissions by up to 30 per cent, at no cost, through the adoption of energy management systems, energy optimization processes, incremental technological upgrades and behavioural changes. Technological developments in the preceding decade had made it even more economical for firms to be energy efficient, and products could be manufactured using one tenth of the energy input previously required.

5. However, energy efficient industrial practices were not yet being adopted at the desired speed and scale, owing to the absence of adequate policies and the lack of proper implementation. Governments had a leading role to play in creating a conducive environment and encouraging investment in energy efficiency. They could do so, for example, by stopping conventional energy subsidies to firms, establishing strong dialogue with industry leaders for the design of effective policies and creating incentives to encourage firms to invest in energy efficiency measures, such as energy management systems for large energy-intensive consumers; tax rebates for energy efficiency and decarbonization projects; the recognition of environmental excellence; and carbon pricing. Local workforces should be equipped with the right knowledge and tools to design and implement energy efficiency and decarbonization solutions within firms. In that connection, UNIDO had launched a knowledge hub and an Industrial Decarbonization Accelerator, which offered tools and training materials to policymakers and practitioners. In addition, in-country technical cooperation programmes on industrial energy efficiency had been conducted in 20 countries and would be extended to others in due course. UNIDO would continue working with its partners to provide comprehensive support to countries for the adoption of suitable policy packages and the widespread decoupling of industry from negative environmental impacts.

6. **The President** asked what transformative policies, including industrial policies, could be implemented by countries as part of their energy transitions towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy, and sustainable development in general. He also asked what specific challenges were being faced by the least developed countries in that context.

7. **Ms. Fukuda-Parr** (Vice-Chair of the Committee for Development Policy), panellist, said that while the original concept of a just energy transition had grown

out of a concern for job losses arising from environmental regulations, it was increasingly being conceptualized as a broader framework that addressed a more complex set of distributional concerns. Among those concerns were the durable elimination of existing and historical injustices, the need to avoid creating new injustices and the consideration of trade-offs between environmental goals and other development priorities. A just transition was one where no one was left behind, and where no one was pushed behind and left worse off as a result of misguided policies.

8. Since just transitions needed to be context-specific, it was difficult to prescribe a set of specific industrial policies. The least developed countries and middle-income countries were diverse and differed from high-income countries in their economic and social structures, since they had younger and more rapidly urbanizing populations, higher poverty rates, gaps in the provision of basic services and more informal labour markets. While those countries faced more challenging circumstances, such as higher costs and limited access to capital, constrained institutional capacities, limited fiscal space and greater vulnerability to external shocks, global policy debates continued to be dominated by priorities that were more relevant to the global North and that were more focused on mitigation and technological solutions. For developing countries, it would be just as important to secure safe, affordable, reliable and modern energy for all and enable energy consumption commensurate with their development needs, as it would be to move away from fossil fuels as energy sources, since a low-carbon transition needed to be combined with the imperatives of economic structural transformation and broader human development goals.

9. Just transitions could not be separated from the broader issues of global climate justice, inequalities in technical and financial capacities and asymmetries of power in the structure of global value chains. Despite having only minimally contributed to historical greenhouse gas emissions and recording only a fraction of the annual per capita emissions of high-income countries, the least developed countries had accounted for 70 per cent of the deaths caused by climate-related disasters in the preceding 50 years. Yet, notwithstanding the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities enshrined in the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the environmental policies of their trading and financial partners could have adverse consequences on the least developed countries by erecting trade barriers and preventing them from participating in the growth of green product markets or from jointly developing and

owning clean technologies and related intellectual property. Green transition strategies therefore needed to be formulated in ways that did not push the least developed countries further behind, but, rather, supported them in their energy transitions.

10. Just global transitions could be leveraged as an opportunity to decrease reliance on fossil fuels and heavily polluting exports, improve resource efficiency and move toward structural change, while avoiding the pitfalls of commodity dependence, deepened inequalities and exclusion. Multilateral support mechanisms would be required, in the form of targeted, flexible and long-term financing, increased technology transfers and capacity-building to help the least developed countries in their low-carbon transitions. The Committee for Development Policy would be discussing those issues and all delegations were invited to attend its in-depth plenary deliberations.

11. **The President** asked what interlinkages existed between Sustainable Development Goal 7 and other Goals, and how those interlinkages could be harnessed to create transformative energy solutions.

12. **Ms. Noronha** (Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the New York Office of the United Nations Environment Programme), panellist, said that the Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance had highlighted the interconnections between current global crises, which in turn emphasized not only challenges, but also opportunities for transformative solutions. The 2030 Agenda focused on the interconnections between the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, on the one hand, and the five critical dimensions of development, on the other: people, prosperity, planet, partnership and peace. Goal 7, through its focus on universal access to energy, renewable energy and energy efficiency, was clearly linked to the enhanced welfare and well-being of people, which were covered by all the Goals, and by Goals 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 in particular. It was therefore very important to see energy as central to enhanced welfare and well-being, since the latter required both physical and social infrastructure, which were covered by Goals 8, 9 and 11, and could not be achieved without energy. In addition, the environment and natural resources, which were covered by Goals 6, 13, 14 and 15, were also crucial, since they had a cause and effect relationship with energy.

13. The high-level dialogue on energy, which had taken place in September 2021, had concluded that universal energy access should not be seen as a trade-off for the climate cause, but as necessary for a resilient future. It had also examined the need for cost-effective

renewable energy technologies, which had evolved from being a technical and economic challenge to representing a set of investment, regulatory and societal opportunities.

14. The transformative energy considerations that had emerged from the aforementioned interlinkages included the need to consider the social and environmental ramifications of energy transition, such as greenhouse gas emissions and the impact of energy transition minerals on biodiversity, and the need for collaboration with financing institutions to transform the energy market by aligning moral and strategic objectives with market forces.

15. **The President** asked how the International Monetary Fund viewed the link between energy transition and climate finance, and what role the Fund's Resilience and Sustainability Trust could play in that respect.

16. **Mr. Powell** (Special Representative of the International Monetary Fund to the United Nations), panellist, said that the recently updated *World Economic Outlook* indicated that the global economy was in a broad-based slowdown with moderating inflationary pressures. While risks were becoming more balanced, domestic policies needed to remain tight in order to restore price stability. In that economic context, climate financing needs were significant, but achievable, with estimates suggesting that approximately 3.3 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP) should be invested annually in energy until 2030 to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

17. The development of adequate climate policies was a prerequisite for enabling private financing, which in turn contributed to the achievement of climate policy goals. Carbon pricing provided critical price signals for redirecting private investment to clean technologies, while also mobilizing revenue, and there was a need for robust and predictable carbon prices as an incentive for low-carbon projects, to help catalyse and efficiently allocate private finance. To help scale up private flows for low-carbon technologies, climate information architecture needed to be strengthened by closing data gaps, standardizing climate-related financial disclosures and developing principles to align investments to sustainability goals. The public and private sectors and multilateral development banks needed to collectively explore avenues for public-private risk-sharing, investments tools and financing structures, and stimulus measures should be screened for their positive and negative climate impact.

18. The International Monetary Fund was contributing to efforts through its Resilience and Sustainability Trust,

which had over \$40 billion in pledges and helped countries to build resilience to balance-of-payment shocks and confront longer-term structural challenges like climate change. Several low-income and vulnerable middle-income countries had already been approved for that facility or had staff-level agreements in place, while others were discussing the possibility. By facilitating the development of a conducive investment environment, the Fund could play a catalytic role in attracting much-needed private investment. Furthermore, the Fund's fiscal affairs department was boosting capacity-building work on green, climate-responsive public financial management and public investment management assessment systems, with a view to helping countries access the necessary funds.

19. **The President** asked what instruments were being proposed by the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters to promote sustainable energy and environmental policies that were coherent with policies in other dimensions of sustainable development, with a view to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

20. **Ms. Kana** (Co-Chair of the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters), panellist, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the Committee had adopted an approach centred on the Sustainable Development Goals and was working on energy transition guidance on two complementary fronts, namely, the energy supply side and the energy demand and consumption side. Taxation was a policy instrument to help countries achieve their clean energy goals, and there were two multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary subcommittees to assist the Committee in its work on extractive industries and environmental taxes, respectively.

21. The main issues with respect to energy supplies were the cost of energy transition, energy access and proper funding for developing countries, revenues for mining countries and those endowed with oil and gas, and the creation of an enabling environment to ensure that taxation was not a barrier to the development of renewable energy sources. With respect to consumption, the primary consideration was determining how environmental taxes could contribute to energy transition, while focusing on the role of carbon taxation. In that connection, the Committee was seeking to analyse whether particular design features were relevant to energy transition and whether those features would give rise to any administrative issues, which could be challenging for developing countries. The Committee looked forward to engaging with the Council and its subsidiary bodies on those important issues, and to the upcoming special meeting on international cooperation in tax matters.

22. **The President** asked for details on the global road map to accelerate action for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7 in support of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, the transformative policies and initiatives that could accelerate progress towards implementing Goal 7 and the interlinkages between Goal 7 and the other Goals.

23. **Ms. Ogunbiyi** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All and Co-Chair of UN-Energy), panellist, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that the global road map to accelerate action on Sustainable Development Goal 7 had been developed at the high-level dialogue on energy in 2021. It called for action to close the energy access gap, rapidly transition to decarbonized energy systems, mobilize adequate and predictable finance, leave no one behind on the path to a net zero future and harness innovation, technology and data. Energy compacts were a key vehicle for translating the global road map into concrete actions and partnerships. There were over 185 approved compact commitments towards the achievement of Goal 7 and other climate-related Goals, which had led to the generation of \$46 billion in investments in the period 2021–2022. Those investments had improved access to electricity and clean cooking for millions of people. The road map and compacts should therefore be used to guide international efforts and ensure the realization of energy, development and climate goals.

24. Transformative policies and initiatives were accelerating progress towards the achievement of Goal 7, especially in the most vulnerable countries, including those in Africa, and innovative ideas such as the Africa carbon markets initiative, which sought to boost financing for clean energy access, should be encouraged and promoted. Time was of the essence and bold solutions were needed to accelerate the energy transition towards net zero emissions by 2050. Furthermore, achieving Goal 7 would help to achieve many other Goals, since, for example, access to affordable, reliable and modern energy in schools was critical for improving the quality of education. In the same vein, the deployment of clean energy solutions was transforming irrigation, agroprocessing and cold storage in rural areas worldwide, and could help to eradicate hunger. Without urgent action, the world would fall short of achieving Goal 7, since many people had regressed into energy poverty owing to the decreased affordability of energy and shrinking incomes. Efforts therefore needed to be dramatically accelerated and commitments needed to be translated into concrete actions on the ground in order to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for all.

25. **Mr. Heartney** (United States of America) said that his Government was fully committed to realizing Sustainable Development Goal 7 and to the clean energy transition, with the aim of promoting affordable and reliable access to energy. A team of government agencies had partnered to advance progress on those issues throughout the United States and worldwide, through various multilateral and international initiatives. The clean energy transition required new supply chains, which needed to be resilient, secure and diversified, and his Government remained focused on meeting its obligations and commitments, while pursuing its goals of combating climate change, encouraging technological innovation and promoting green growth, both domestically and regionally. It would continue to provide global leadership on the clean energy transition and increased energy access through different technological, regulatory and market-based tools.

26. **Mr. Ren Hong Yan** (China) said that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, persistent geopolitical tensions, energy market volatility and widespread imbalances in energy demand and supply had made it difficult for the international community to maintain energy security and accelerate the energy transition. China attached great importance to energy security and had made major contributions to global energy development and cooperation. It had been promoting the orderly optimization and adjustment of the energy mix, had achieved noteworthy results in the high-quality development of energy and had maintained a self-sufficiency rate of over 80 per cent. China was unwavering in its promotion of the transition to green and low-carbon energy, and had built the largest carbon market and green energy power generation system in the world. Its investments in the installed capacity of hydro, wind, solar and biomass energy sources were all ranked first in the world, and it accounted for half of the total number of vehicles powered by new energies worldwide.

27. China, which was actively responding to climate change and engaging in international energy cooperation, had announced its intention to have carbon dioxide emissions peak by 2030 and to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. It vigorously supported developing countries in their development of green and low-carbon energy, would not build any new coal-powered projects abroad, was promoting the joint development of a green belt and road initiative and had launched a belt and road energy cooperation partnership to engage in green energy cooperation projects with over 100 countries and regions. In June 2022, China had announced that it would build partnerships for clean energy and explore the establishment of an international coalition for energy transformation.

28. As the international energy transition was faced with complex political and economic challenges, there was a need to coordinate the short- and long-term nexuses between economic development, energy security and environmental protection in order to balance all factors and ensure that the transition process would not have a negative impact on economies and livelihoods. The politicization, manipulation and weaponization of energy issues should be firmly opposed, along with unilateral sanctions. Developed countries should show greater ambition and take the lead in cutting emissions and refraining from dramatic policy changes or regressions, while providing developing countries with adequate support for achieving fair, inclusive and sustainable energy transitions, and ensuring energy accessibility and affordability. China would continue to play a responsible and constructive role by deepening communication and cooperation with all parties in order to jointly achieve the energy-related Sustainable Development Goals and make further contributions to accelerating implantation of the 2030 Agenda.

29. **Ms. Mejía Giraldo** (Colombia) said that her Government was committed to environmental and climate justice. A fair, safe, reliable and efficient energy transition was essential for achieving carbon neutrality priorities and increasing climate resilience. In the light of increases in global temperatures, there was an urgent need for an energy policy and for the close link between Sustainable Development Goals 7 and 13 to be recognized and addressed at the multilateral level in the relevant international forums. There were great opportunities to create and strengthen a regional energy market in Latin America on the basis of existing initiatives, with a particular focus on renewable energies. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean could play an important role in that regard by identifying challenges and opportunities and adequately assessing the energy transition needs of the region. Despite the economic challenges posed by decarbonization, energy transition would bring great opportunities in the context of post-COVID-19 economic recovery, and could potentially create decent work, if planned appropriately. Energy transition was essential for fair, inclusive and sustainable recovery and should be implemented on a gradual basis, with the full participation of the society, in order to close development gaps between urban and rural areas and provide more democratic access to clean and safe energy.

30. **Mr. Meshchanov** (Observer for the Russian Federation) said that his Government was committed to international cooperation in the area of energy

transition, for which equal and mutually beneficial cooperation was critical. The politicization of energy matters was a matter of concern as it could lead to an energy deficit and create energy supply problems. Particular attention should be paid to energy security and to the issue of access to reliable sources of energy, which was becoming increasingly difficult. His delegation supported agreed that price limitations on energy flows and unilateral sanctions in the energy sector were counterproductive. Such approaches should be reviewed as they served only to reduce investment and supply, brought about energy supply deficits and disproportionately affected developing countries. Target 7.a of the Sustainable Development Goals called for enhanced international cooperation with a view to facilitating access to technologies and green energy, and for investment in energy infrastructure and technology. Further details would be appreciated on how the United Nations system and other international entities would ensure progress on that target, which was key for addressing a range of energy transition issues.

31. **Mr. Ratsimandresy** (Madagascar) said that his country was in favour of the energy transition and remained determined to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Developing countries often found it difficult to access financing from trust funds, such as the recently established Resilience and Sustainability Fund, which was crucial for development projects relating to energy transition. While investment in energy infrastructure required concessional funding, investors were hesitant because of the risk involved, and more information would be welcome on the modalities adopted by the International Monetary Fund to take risk into account.

32. **Mr. Raguttahalli** (India) said that while transitioning to renewables would undoubtedly be at the core of climate action, the developmental needs and aspirations of developing countries should also be taken into consideration during that transition. Developing countries, especially in Africa, were not attracting sufficient investment, and mechanisms needed to be put in place to help countries in need of investment in order to avoid delays in the energy transition and other challenges. Developed countries needed to scale up investment and access to technology to ensure future energy access, security and affordability, while remaining sensitive to the energy mix and the specific circumstances of developing countries.

33. **Mr. Zou** (Deputy to the Director General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)), speaking via video link, said that policy measures should be implemented using a very structured approach. Energy management was of crucial

importance and, through its in-country programmes, UNIDO would continue to support Governments and enterprises in implementing energy management systems that were in line with national and international standards. The production and consumption of industrial commodities, such as steel, cement and fertilizers, were expected to increase and the decarbonization of those sectors would be more difficult since the required technologies were still in the early stages of development. Developed and developing countries needed to cooperate on incentives that would encourage firms to invest in accelerating the development and deployment of those technologies, and efforts by the international community in that regard would be extremely beneficial.

34. **Ms. Fukuda-Parr** (Vice-Chair of the Committee for Development Policy) said that investments in Africa were indeed insufficient. It was important to establish multilateral international structures and mechanisms that reflected current investment opportunities and challenges, such the secure supply of clean minerals. Multilateral investments were also needed for de-risking investments in sustainable energy infrastructure and for addressing physical climate risks in the developing world. While countries needed to take positive actions, they also needed to resist taking actions that would negatively affect other countries.

35. **Ms. Noronha** (Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the New York Office of the United Nations Environment Programme) said that collaboration was crucial for advancing the green energy transition, not only because of the difficulties faced by countries as a result of asymmetrical capacities, but also because it enabled discussions and helped to build trust. The Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-lived Climate Pollutants was an example of such collaboration, which worked on accelerating cooling initiatives, and several multi-stakeholder initiatives were making similar efforts to implement much-needed collaborations. Partnerships were also being established between the private sector and Governments to further the movement towards electric mobility and increase the energy efficiency of appliances, and the International Solar Alliance was doing similar work in the area of solar energy. While collaboration remained key, leadership was also important, since there could be no progress on collaboration without leadership.

36. **Mr. Powell** (Special Representative of the International Monetary Fund to the United Nations) said that the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action met regularly to discuss climate-related issues that were of particular interest to finance ministries. Access to many trust funds was complex and sometimes

cumbersome, and the public and private sectors and multilateral development banks needed to collectively explore avenues for better public-private risk-sharing and investment tools. While considerable challenges, particularly political ones, might delay progress in the areas of carbon pricing and taxation until carbon pricing was able to generate the types of incentives required to give impetus to the energy transition, multilateral banks could mobilize private finance through risk transfers and market structures, on the condition that such financing did not lead to the privatization of gains or the socialization of losses.

Panel discussion: “Digital transformation for health and food security”

37. **The President** said that the discussion would explore digital transformation solutions for advancing Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 3, and examine the role of the United Nations system, including the subsidiary bodies of the Council, in promoting digital transformation for health and food security. He asked how digital transformation was facilitating the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and advancing the realization of Goal 3.

38. **Dr. Ghebreyesus** (Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO)), panellist, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that digital technologies held enormous potential for health and food safety, and could take the form of digital diagnostics for on-the-spot testing, drone technology for delivering medical supplies to remote areas, mobile food labelling applications, or block chain technology for improving food safety. However, there was a need to ensure that those technologies helped to narrow inequities, rather than widen them, since the lack of connectivity or electricity and gender inequalities in access to technology could leave some people even further behind. Moreover, digital tools could also be used for harm and the marketing of unhealthy products and behaviours, and children and people in marginalized communities were at particular risk. WHO was working to help countries maximize the benefits of digital tools for health and food security and mitigate risks by supporting the establishment of digital guidelines, data governance frameworks and policies to protect privacy and data security. It was also committed to enabling the development of laws, regulations and policies that promoted public trust and restricted the use of digital marketing to children and adolescents.

39. **The President** asked what progress had been made in the generation of high-quality and timely data to monitor progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, in particular for Goals 2 and 3, and

what role digital transformation had played in that regard.

40. **Ms. Vukovich** (Chair of the Statistical Commission), panellist, speaking via video link, said that current challenges required high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated statistics and data in order to support global and national sustainable development. While official statistics were not the only source of information, they were the most reliable and trustworthy sources, since they were scientifically well-founded and based on fundamental principles. In recent years, the policy and data landscape had undergone transformative changes driven by digitalization, the data revolution and the need for quick policy responses to address national, regional and global challenges. As data-driven decision-making had become the norm, politicians and policymakers needed high-quality and timely data to tackle policy challenges, address and mitigate crises, formulate policies and monitor progress.

41. With the support of national statistical systems, the Statistical Commission had responded rapidly to the need to assess progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was refined annually, had been comprehensively reviewed in 2020 and would undergo a further such review in 2025. Of its 231 indicators, 14 were directly related to food security and nutrition, while 28 were related to healthy lives. Although considerable progress had been made in the availability of internationally comparable data since the adoption of the Goals, serious data gaps continued to exist in many countries. While data were readily available on Goal 3, since over 80 per cent of countries submitted data on a regular basis, improvements were required in most countries in terms of the granularity of indicators and the social or geographic disaggregation of data on several other Goals and targets.

42. The Statistical Commission continued to develop statistical standards and provide guidance to countries for the development of national statistical strategies and the modernization of official statistics through the development of specific statistical domains, the promotion of new methodologies and new data sources, the integration of data from various sources, the elaboration of accounting frameworks and the development of social statistics and household surveys. Since those efforts served to develop national statistical systems and produce internationally comparable data, they were also beneficial to the international community. Working groups, workshops and global events overseen by the Commission contributed to the

dissemination of relevant professional knowledge and it continuously cooperated with the regional commissions, United Nations agencies and other subsidiary bodies of the Council.

43. During the COVID-19 pandemic, national statistical systems had shown agility and a capacity to improve considerably on timeliness and relevance. New survey techniques and estimation methods had been elaborated and introduced, often resulting in almost real-time data on critical pandemic-related social and economic issues that had been subsequently integrated into standard statistical production processes. The urgent call for more and better data had been heard by statisticians, and digital transformation was an important enabler for modernizing statistics and responding to that call. However, decision-makers also needed to respond to a broader call for national and international investment in sustainable statistical systems and high-quality data to allow for the development of data production, technical and technological infrastructure, institutional capacity-building and professional training programmes. The Statistical Commission could contribute to improving lives by improving data.

44. **The President** asked how Governments could strengthen their public institutions in the digital era to improve public service delivery, what challenges and opportunities could arise from digitalization in that context and what were some examples of good practices.

45. **Ms. Fraser-Moleketi** (Chair of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration), panellist, said that her Committee had focused on four issues in its consideration of digital governance challenges and the prospects for building forward better, namely: reinforcing trust in government; bridging digital divides and leaving no one behind; digitalization as an anti-corruption strategy; and investing in public sector capabilities and expertise.

46. The acceleration of government digitalization brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic was irreversible and had profound effects on data- and information-sharing and on public service delivery. Furthermore, it had created opportunities for collaboration within Governments and with citizens and other actors. While digitalization could strengthen trust, integrity and inclusion in government, and support recovery and development efforts, it was critical to ensure that digital transformation strengthened trust in Governments' capacity to deliver equitable public services, manage personal data and address risks of disinformation and polarization. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public health measures had been undermined

by vaccine hesitancy and conspiracy theories, resulting in the loss of lives and rising health-care costs, and similar phenomena had been observed in the area of climate action and elsewhere, diminishing Governments' ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

47. There was a broader challenge of ensuring a just, inclusive, people-centred and rights-based digital transformation while mitigating the risk of widening digital divides. The rapid development of science and technology had created preconditions for potentially reducing socioeconomic inequalities and the time and cost of access to services, while online learning and digital education represented immense opportunities. However, billions of people were not yet connected to the Internet, and basic challenges persisted with respect to the availability of energy, electricity and sufficient bandwidth. Hybrid public service delivery models should therefore be considered in order to leave no one behind.

48. Digital innovations had a critical role to play in preventing and deterring corruption and, more broadly, the digitalization of government could reduce opportunities for bribery and corruption, especially in high-risk policy areas relating to the management of public finances. However, to fully exploit the integrity-related benefits of digital transformation, greater synergy was needed between digital government reforms and anti-corruption strategies. While digitalization could enhance transparency, the extent of that transparency was contingent on political will, as was the decision to apply digitalization to different policy spaces. Furthermore, the impact of government digitalization on corruption control also depended on the effective use of the relevant digital and analytical tools by actors such as oversight agencies and audit institutions.

49. Governments needed to strengthen their digital capabilities and expertise in order to guide the digital transformation and effectively invest in and deploy technological solutions. The availability of skilled workers was a particular challenge for Governments, especially in developing countries, and it had become necessary to mitigate the loss of digital skills by adequately remunerating and motivating public sector workers. Investment in the areas of human capital and technology should be accorded greater importance in national human resource strategies and budgets. The need to strengthen digital capabilities and expertise also applied to regulators, whose digital capabilities should be upgraded with a view to improving regulations and enforcing compliance with privacy regulations and other requirements.

50. In considering the importance and role of the Council, and in preparation for the midterm review of the 2030 Agenda, the subsidiary bodies had repeatedly reflected on the central importance of policy coherence. However, there seemed to be pervasive divergence on the issues of policies and policy implementation. While solutions had been identified in certain instances, political will seemed to be lacking. The current context had created unprecedented challenges that required unprecedented political and administrative responses, for which no legal basis might exist in some cases. The Council should be ready to address those challenges and think beyond national interests.

51. **The President** asked how the Council, its subsidiary bodies and the entities of the United Nations system could contribute to preparations for the global digital compact and to its follow-up after the 2024 Summit of the Future.

52. **Mr. Gill** (Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology), panellist, said that innovative, ambitious and bold approaches were needed to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which meant that digital and scientific technologies and innovations must be leveraged in new ways. Certain countries and organizations were already judiciously leveraging those technologies, and political will and innovative thinking were required to adopt similar approaches to policy coordination and political reflections within the subsidiary bodies of the Council.

53. The global digital compact, which had been proposed for adoption in 2024 at the Summit of the Future offered an overview of the new digital age, with a view to updating ways of thinking, refreshing normative approaches, outlining actions for addressing potential misuses and risks and maximizing the potential of new technologies to help achieve the Goals. In view of past experiences, it was critical to have clarity on the role of digital technology, which allowed for a systemic approach in different sectors, lowered barriers to innovation by accelerating research, facilitated inclusivity and enabled real-time policy development and adjustments. In that context, there was a need to establish proper governance and regulatory frameworks by way of legislative action in order to protect human lives and prevent misuse. As more and more sensitive sectors were digitized, there was a growing need for regulations to address cybersecurity risks, physical and digital public infrastructure, and capacity-building.

54. The benefits of digital transformation should be brought to bear through concrete programmes and projects in areas such as health, agriculture and food security, governance and the delivery of citizen services,

education and the green energy and climate change transitions. Data needed to be considered in three ways: data on the Goals, in the form of metrics and indicators; existing but inaccessible data in the public and private sectors, which required collaborative action; and non-existent data that needed to be generated. Data commons included gold standard and flagship data sets in areas such as the green transition, where there had not yet been any data that worked for public purposes. The challenge was to align existing data sets and expertise with specific Goals and targets, and assemble them into data commons, in order to reap the full benefits of digital transformation.

55. **The President** asked what transformative policy proposals had been advanced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the context of digital transformation to help accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and how digital technologies were being harnessed to promote food security and support inclusive rural development. He also wished to know how FAO could support the design and implementation of such policies in the follow-up to the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit.

56. **Ms. Bechdol** (Deputy Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)), panellist, said that while the 2030 deadline was fast approaching, the work needed to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 2, was increasing every year, making urgent action vital to get international efforts back on track. Data, digitalization and innovation were key accelerators to that end and were central to the work of FAO, since digital technologies could transform economies and societies. Such transformation could have a greater impact when digital technologies were introduced into agrifood systems to help improve food security. Precision agriculture and its related innovations, for instance, helped farmers to optimize crop yields, improve water usage, better manage their fertilizer and other inputs, and produce more crops with fewer inputs and less environmental impact.

57. Digital tools and big data could improve the availability and accessibility of knowledge and information to support more inclusive, targeted and transformative policy interventions in agrifood systems and, ultimately, could democratize the agricultural playing field by connecting farmers to markets and improving their access to loans, credit, insurance and other types of finance. Nonetheless, if and when that digital transformation was not accessible to all, there was a considerable risk of widening existing gaps. It was therefore necessary to ensure that small-scale and

family farmers and rural communities had access to technologies that were relevant and applicable to their specific contexts. Providing that access was a priority for FAO, which was responding to the needs identified by and with countries through different initiatives.

58. The 1,000 Digital Villages Initiative of FAO accelerated the digital transformation of rural areas by helping farmers to improve their productivity through the use of information and communications technologies and digital solutions, and by improving their access to financial services, social protection and employment opportunities. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative of FAO was a business model for matching investment with development opportunities in countries, through the development of complex and sophisticated data sets for countries in need of critical innovations in agricultural production. Using advanced analytics, Governments were helped to identify strengths and weaknesses, and the best approaches for developing long-term national agricultural plans. Once those plans were adopted, FAO brought in the private sector and multilateral development banks to target agricultural investments more precisely. The Farmer Field School Approach of FAO, which sought to inform farmers about best practices in order to improve their decision-making, was also being upgraded and digitalized to have a greater reach. Training would henceforth be extended to digital applications and data-driven decision-making tools using the most advanced digital literacy tools and training methods, with a view to preventing the digital divide from widening further.

59. The digital transformation of agrifood systems was an important element of national food systems transformation pathways, which would be critical for the upcoming stocktaking of the Food Systems Summit. Such stocktaking would be an opportunity to collectively review progress, share early success stories and help chart the way forward. As such, it would be a milestone towards the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

60. **Ms. Juarez Argueta** (Observer for Guatemala) said that while digital transformation was crucial for sustainable recovery and resilience in the face of various multidimensional crises, there were challenges relating to universal access, security and human rights that made it necessary for States to create safe environments and reduce digital illiteracy. Increased connectivity and access to technology would enable populations to enjoy new technologies and, in Guatemala, increased connectivity had helped small-scale farmers to enhance their financial security and access to markets, while also creating new opportunities. Technical schools were being set up to train women and young people in

agricultural production and enable them to supply State school feeding programmes, in order to build more resilient food systems. Agricultural insurance had been implemented to cover damage caused by climate change, with the support of the United Nations system and various international partners, including FAO. Digital solutions were essential for identifying beneficiary populations and ensuring accountability and follow-up. They also helped to create transparency in public authorities

61. **Ms. Schlyter** (Sweden) said that Sweden was facilitating discussions in the context of consultations on the global digital compact. The road map for the process included several thematic sessions, which would be held in the coming months. It had been suggested during the current consultations that the thematic issues should be taken primarily from the Secretary-General's report entitled "Our Common Agenda" and also from the midterm review of the Sustainable Development Goals, and her delegation looked forward to confirming those thematic issues, in order to enable delegations to prepare for the discussions. Support had been expressed during the consultation for a multi-stakeholder approach, which was expected to build upon existing United Nations initiatives, including the World Summit on the Information Society, the Road Map for Digital Cooperation and the Internet Governance Forum, create synergies across different processes and leverage the expertise of the United Nations system. The critical importance of universal, affordable and meaningful access to the Internet had also been stressed during the consultative process under way, along with the need to address the digital divide.

62. **Ms. Mejía Giraldo** (Colombia) said that the right to food and food security was an essential element of the national development plan of Colombia for the period 2022–2026, which would make her country a world power in that area. It was important to take account of local practices in providing food and guarantee that citizens, especially the most vulnerable ones, had better access to food. Digital transformation was critical for achieving that outcome and, if used to develop a knowledge society and a productive economy using traditional and local practices, it would accelerate post-COVID-19 pandemic socioeconomic recovery and help to eradicate hunger and extreme poverty. The United Nations could bolster those efforts through the global digital compact, since closing digital gaps would make it possible to ensure universal connectivity, avoid Internet fragmentation and educate the population on the most effective use of information and communications technology tools.

63. The inclusion of rural communities in the digital economy would give a new impetus to shorter and more sustainable value chains and boost the consumption of local production, in keeping with the need to reduce the carbon footprint of agriculture and trade. In that connection, support from the funds and programmes of the United Nations would be crucial for strengthening the role of digital transformation. Colombia remained committed to the negotiations to be undertaken in that regard during the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Priority should be given to coordinating the progress made by that Commission with the work of the other subsidiary bodies of the Council in order to ensure respect for rights, close gender gaps and give all women access to the inclusive solutions of the digital economy.

64. **Ms. Mendoza Elguea** (Mexico) said that digital transformation was needed to address current challenges. In Mexico, digitalization was being used to create conditions and opportunities for the small-scale producers living in isolated, marginalized areas. Digital transformation would make it possible to include young people and develop rural areas. Her Government found it essential to provide the appropriate conditions for the creation of an adequate digital ecosystem, including through the development of digital inclusion policies, which would make it possible to launch digital literacy programmes and ensure access to food at affordable prices. It was therefore indispensable to have universal, accessible and high-quality connectivity, as well as physical and digital infrastructure, in order to establish more balance among different communities and provide employment opportunities, access to food and high-quality basic services. However, digital transformation would not be possible without efficient coordination at the United Nations level and, in that regard, the joint work of the subsidiary bodies of the Council and the entities of the United Nations system was key for developing digital technology and public policies, and for ensuring effective multilateralism, with the provision of financial and technical assistance. The global digital compact would be a step forward in that direction, and further information would be welcome on the progress being made by the Office of the Envoy on Technology in the area of technology and food security.

65. **Mr. Raguttahalli** (India) said that since health and food security were directly or indirectly linked to most of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, digital transformation in those areas was essential. That reality was particularly relevant to the countries of the global South. India had made significant digital transformation gains in a bid to fast-track development and address the challenges posed by the COVID-19

pandemic. In leveraging technology for the development of the health sector, certain aspects, such as the creation of digital public goods and financial inclusion, had been beneficial to developing countries. In addition to supplying hundreds of millions of vaccine doses to more than 100 countries, India had administered millions of doses to its own population. His country's development of capacity-building programmes using digital technology was helping partner countries in Africa and elsewhere, and its public distribution system was the largest food-based social protection scheme in the world.

66. Digital technology in India was also transforming agriculture and contributing to improved water management through the adoption of smart irrigation systems, while telemedicine and teleconsultation facilities were allowing people in remote villages to access much-needed medical services. Sharing the knowledge and experience gained from digitalization was important within the Council and the wider United Nations system, since development had become inseparable from digital technology. Discussions on the global digital compact could pave the way towards mutual benefits and help to bridge the digital divide.

67. **Mr. Zhao** Haibo (China) said that the resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the complexity of the global food security situation could severely jeopardize efforts to eradicate hunger and achieve other Sustainable Development Goals. Digital technologies, as the primary engine powering the world's technological revolution and industrial transformation, had become an important driving force for reshaping the global health-care industry and enabling a cost-effective and efficient agricultural system. The international community needed to step up exchanges and cooperation in order to jointly tackle global health and food security challenges.

68. The United Nations should play a central coordinating role in enhancing digital policy coordination at the global level, and help to build an open, fair and non-discriminatory digital development environment. Connectivity should be vigorously promoted with a view to bridging the digital divide more rapidly, and United Nations agencies and developed countries should provide more financial, technological and capacity-building support to developing countries in order to help the latter to improve their digital infrastructure and enhance their digital development capacity.

69. Information technology needed to be leveraged in order to promote global health-care cooperation. In that regard, China called for a people-centred health-care system and joint participation in global health

governance to build a shared community of health for all. Investment in agricultural technology should also be increased and digital technologies should be used to transform traditional agriculture and agricultural models, boost agricultural productivity and enhance the resilience of the global food system.

70. China had been actively using scientific and technological innovations to ensure human health, well-being and food security by feeding close to one fifth of the world's population, providing assistance to developing countries and helping to fight the spread of epidemics and improve agricultural production capacities through foreign aid and South-South cooperation. It had proposed a Global Development Initiative: building on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for stronger, greener and healthier global development, which focused on food security, the digital economy and digital connectivity as priority areas of cooperation. His Government remained committed to advancing global digital transformation for food security. It stood ready to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the Belt and Road Initiative and the implementation of the Global Development Initiative, to deepen strategic cooperation in the digital domain and to exchange beneficial experiences in the digital transformation of health care and agriculture.

71. **Ms. Mamesah** (Indonesia) said that global digital cooperation should prioritize the closing of technological and infrastructural gaps between developing and developed countries. As digital technologies would be increasingly critical for implementing the 2030 Agenda, they should be available, accessible and affordable for all. Her Government considered the development of technological infrastructure to be a high priority for improving connectivity nationwide, particularly in rural areas.

72. The COVID-19 pandemic had accelerated the use of digital technology in almost all aspects of daily life by increasing Internet traffic, shifting consumer behaviour and transforming the health and education sectors. Over 200 million Internet users were contributing to the digital economy of the country. Students had shifted to online learning, using digital technology that covered those in remote areas, and small and medium-sized enterprises were utilizing e-commerce platforms, thereby contributing to GDP and providing employment to a significant portion of the population, comprising mostly women.

73. Addressing the technological infrastructure gap was key for empowering people, promoting innovative solutions to current challenges, facilitating economic

growth and enabling inclusive post-COVID-19 recovery. Since infrastructure was the biggest challenge facing developing countries and digital transformation could help those countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, further information would be appreciated on how the intergovernmental process could be safeguarded in the global digital compact, and on how development could be kept at the heart of negotiations.

74. **Mr. Meshchanov** (Observer for the Russian Federation) said that digital transformation was necessary and inevitable for ensuring the effective development of public administration. People-centred approaches helped citizens to address specific issues in the easiest way possibly. In Russia, while all services relating to the payment of social benefits would be carried out online from 2024, the population would continue to have the option of accessing those services in person. All executive bodies and State structures in Russia were implementing their own digital transformation programmes and a system had been set up to rate the digital transformation of those entities, which gave an overview of their digital progress. Heads of ministries had access to those ratings and could use them to adjust efforts and work on the key indicators that had been identified. Digital transformation of the State apparatus required consideration of the need to ensure digital sovereignty in the development of national and local technologies and software, and Russia was bearing that need in mind as it moved along the path towards digital transformation.

75. **Mr. Obermeyer** (Director, New York Office of the World Health Organization (WHO)), said that WHO had created a new department focused on digital transformation and its application for ensuring the best health care possible in all countries. While some new innovations and discoveries were not necessarily a positive development for health, others were extremely beneficial. There should be a concerted effort to guard against certain dangers such as inequities in access, the violation of data privacy laws and the increasing use of digital technologies by children, which exposed them to products that could be harmful to their health and behaviour. The international community should look at how digital innovations in the areas of health, food, agriculture and the environment could be applied for the benefit of all. In the environmental domain, there were several tracking initiatives for early warnings about outbreaks and natural disasters, which helped health systems to prepare their response. In that connection, the Council might wish to consider important cross-cutting topics relating to the health of humans, plants and animals, such as how technologies could be harnessed

to track the overuse of antibiotics in animals and its direct impact on human health. The One Health approach might be an area in which the Council could contribute to discussions at upcoming high-level meetings.

76. **Ms. Vukovich** (Chair of the Statistical Commission), speaking via video link, said that access to the Internet and to mobile devices had considerably improved the area of statistics through online data collection, which was a very cost-efficient and quick method of collecting and processing data that were already being utilized by many countries for their censuses. Consideration should be given to the digital content that was available to populations, since digitalization provided access for a wider section of the population to such content, which included statistical information. The latter was a tool for democracy, because it allowed for the use of impartial, official and principle-based statistics, to judge the performance of the economy, the society and policies. The three types of data – namely official data, unofficial data that were not yet in use and data that had not yet been generated – were reflected in the area of statistics. Her Commission produced a significant proportion of official data, worked on integrating unofficial data and big data into production streams, and explored various information sources with the aim of translating non-numerical information into metrics and statistics. In that regard, the modernization of official statistics had benefited greatly from digitalization and efforts to make the use of digital tools and devices more widespread.

77. **Ms. Fraser-Moleketi** (Chair of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration) said that Sustainable Development Goal 16 on institution-building was cross-cutting and interlinked with all the other Goals, and there was a need to take into account the importance of institution-building, public administration and the centrality of government in the realization of digital transformation and the provision of services. Human capital was critically important at all levels of government, across different spheres, and efforts should be made to ensure appropriate training within Governments and public services as part of a new approach to development. Furthermore, for digitalization to be effective, legislative and regulatory frameworks needed to be adapted and updated. Universal access included access to bandwidth, data, digital infrastructure and education for all ages and genders, but also required an enabling legislative environment. Her Committee had been grappling with those issues since 2020, based on the need for hybrid and context-specific interventions that did not exclude

citizens lacking access to online services, especially in developing countries.

78. **Mr. Gill** (Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology) said that hybridity was crucial to prevent the creation of new divides along economic lines, and continuous efforts were needed to improve analogue systems, since digitalization often amplified existing deficiencies in sectors such as health care and education. The 2030 Agenda would be central to the global digital compact, which would seek to consider both the challenges and potentialities of the digital world in order to minimize problems and risks while maximizing future prospects. The national examples provided had shed light on the growing share of the digital economy in emerging economies, which would be critical for accelerated development in the coming decades, and the global digital compact would therefore have to encompass the three pillars of the United Nations in a comprehensive manner. His Office had recently been established and was in the process of developing strategies and its approach to governance, the Sustainable Development Goals and coherence and coordination across the United Nations system. With respect to the Goals, his Office would be supporting the work undertaken by other agencies in the digital domain with a view to making a concrete contribution to the midterm review of the 2030 Agenda and to the Summit of the Future.

79. In the area of capacity-building, his Office was focused on scaling up existing programmes and initiatives to make them more coherent and increase connectivity with external partners. In the domain of data science for development, there was a significant shortage of data scientists working on social areas and the Goals, and of cybersecurity specialists. While training could help to address the issue to a certain extent, consideration was being given to ways in which efforts could be scaled up by developing common competency frameworks and pooling trainers and training materials within the context of South-South and triangular cooperation.

80. **Ms. Bechdol** (Deputy Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that connectivity for small-scale farmers in rural communities was of paramount importance and that connectivity should be affordable and accompanied by the services, tools and technical knowledge required to maximize potential benefits. In agricultural terms, the promotion of digital public goods could take the form of crop calendars and other seasonal or cyclical tools and information pertaining to the seasonality of planting and harvesting. Such initiatives could be extremely useful in the light of the global food

security crisis and concerns about the availability of important agricultural inputs, since many farmers in developed and developing countries were contemplating the diversification of their crop bases. FAO had developed a dashboard on fertilizer prescription and use, which had proven to be a timely initiative, given current uncertainties and instabilities in the availability of fertilizers, and ensuring that the dashboard was accessible to all would be crucial. FAO was also working with various partners to provide soil mapping information to African and other developing countries, so that they would better understand their fertilization needs for more effective crop production. Data-driven analysis was a critical and basic step towards solving larger problems while protecting natural resources and the environment. Since digital tools and data science facilitated the inclusion of youth and there was a considerable risk of losing future generations of farmers, the opportunity to utilize digital applications to attract young persons to farming and agriculture should not be missed.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.