General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
26 February 2020

Original: English

Second Committee

Summary record of the 17th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 18 October 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Niang . . . . (Senegal)
later: Ms. Fisher-Tsin (Vice-Chair) . . . . (Israel)

Contents

19-18144 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 16: Information and communications technologies for sustainable development (A/74/62−E/2019/6)

1.   **Ms. Sirimanne** (Director of the Technology and Logistics Division, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)), introducing 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/74/62−E/2019/6), said that a conference paper (E/CN.16/2019/CRP.2) had also been prepared that complemented the report of the Secretary-General.

2.   Over half of the global population was now connected to the Internet, but that figure concealed significant divides between regions and between and within countries. Without Internet access, billions of people would be excluded from the benefits of digitalization.

3.   The development of information and communications technologies (ICTs) had had a profound impact on the labour market since the time of the World Summit on the Information Society. Rapid technological change was accelerating the digitalization of a wide variety of occupations and was likely to drive more extensive changes in employment. Adaptability was becoming essential.

4.   The UNCTAD publication *Digital Economy Report 2019* examined how developing countries could create and capture value in the digital economy. Value creation was driven by platformization and the monetization of digital data. Access to data was becoming essential to value creation and digital platforms were uniquely positioned to extract such data. As a result, market power had become concentrated in a few global digital platforms. Under the current regulations, it was highly likely that digitalization would contribute to rising inequality and further consolidation rather than to more inclusive development. Governments had a critical role to play in shaping the digital economy by defining the rules in close dialogue with other stakeholders.

5.   Digital trade estimates showed that global e-commerce sales had grown by 13 per cent in 2017, a very high rate of growth at a time when the global economy was stagnating. The challenge would be to ensure that no one was left behind, and UNCTAD had organized an e-commerce week in April 2019 to discuss e-commerce, digitalization and development and how they were shaping society. Another e-commerce week

would be organized for April 2020. In collaboration with the African Union and the European Union, UNCTAD had organized the first Africa e-commerce week in December 2018 to reach those who most needed to participate in the discussion. To mitigate the lack of policy-relevant statistics on the digital economy in developing countries, a Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy had been established in 2019.

6.   Frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning were bringing tremendous opportunities but also new challenges for society, including cybersecurity and privacy issues and the growing decision-making power of devices.

7.   The High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation established by the Secretary-General had presented its recommendations in its report *The Age of Digital Interdependence* in June 2019. Among other matters, the report considered how digital technology could support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure a more inclusive digital economy, and how the global architecture for digital cooperation could be improved. UNCTAD stood ready to follow up on the Panel's recommendations through capacity-building mechanisms and the United Nations bodies that it serviced, in particular the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.

8.   The information society had changed profoundly in the 15 years since the World Summit on the Information Society had been held. Although significant progress had been made in access to and the use and application of ICTs, far more needed to be done to ensure that the benefits and opportunities of digital innovation were available to all. The impact of the information society was likely to be even more far-reaching in the coming years. Emerging issues presented new and complex challenges and considerably more international cooperation would be required.

9.   **Mr. Khan** (Pakistan) asked how the knowledge gained through the work of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation and the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation could be put to practical use to further advance digital cooperation, especially at the intergovernmental level.

10.   **Ms. Sirimanne** (Director of the Technology and Logistics Division, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)) said that, although the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation had been unable to reach an agreement on the very complex and fast-moving issues, it had been one of the first multi-stakeholder groups to be formed under the Commission on Science and Technology for Development to discuss

enhanced cooperation. Profound ideas, experiences and lessons had been shared, which had been extensively documented, and the report of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation drew heavily on the material generated by the working groups. While it was difficult for Member States to reach agreement on matters pertaining to digital data, holding an open dialogue had been an extremely valuable experience.

11.   **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

12.   **Ms. Jallaq** (Observer for the State of Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that international cooperation would be essential to realize the full potential of digital technology while avoiding unintended consequences and to close the digital divide. Such cooperation must be based on inclusivity, equity, international law and multilateralism, and must be people-centred and complemented by a multi-stakeholder approach. In that regard, it was regrettable that the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation had been unable to reach consensus on critical issues. The United Nations system must give priority to developing countries in science and technology matters for development.

13.   The Group recognized the significance of platformization and the monetization of digital data. Digital platforms using data-driven business models could be used for development purposes and to solve societal problems, especially those related to the Sustainable Development Goals, bearing in mind the importance of promoting financial inclusion, eradicating poverty and bridging digital divides and inequalities. Most developing countries had limited capacity to collect, analyse and monetize digital data. There was therefore a risk that they would lag behind as suppliers of raw data that were later required to pay for the digital intelligence developed using those data.

14.   While the spread of digital technologies had the potential to support economic, social and financial inclusion, it could also exacerbate inequality. Governments could play a critical role in shaping the digital economy while taking account of existing digital divides, States' varying levels of readiness to engage in the digital economy and the increasing consolidation of market power in a few digital platforms.

15.   Policy responses needed to explore new pathways for structural transformation and for local value creation and capture through digitalization. Governments and other stakeholders must have sufficient policy space to ensure that the digital economy was inclusive and of benefit to all. Reaching consensus in areas such as

competition, cross-border data flows and employment would require flexibility in order to satisfy all countries.

16.   The development community needed to provide more comprehensive support to countries that were lagging behind in the digital economy. Such assistance should aim to reduce digital divides, strengthen the enabling environment for value creation and capture, and build capacities in both the private and public sectors.

17.   **Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that, as noted in the Secretary-General's report on implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (A/74/69–E/2019/12), new and emerging technologies were being used to enhance sustainable development in some least developed countries, but were far from widely used. Furthermore, the median ratio of expenditure in that field as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) was 0.75 per cent or less between 2015 and 2016, compared with a global figure of around 2 per cent.

18.   A study on the economic impact of broadband in countries in special situations, co-authored by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), indicated that expanding broadband access had a significant economic impact in least developed countries and other vulnerable developing countries. Investment in ICTs for least developed countries was therefore crucial to their successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

19.   Innovation and new technologies were also changing patterns of food production, trade and consumption. In the push for sustainable food systems and in the face of volatility caused by climate change, technology would be key to efficient food production. However, technology was not readily available to small-scale producers. Measures should be taken to provide least developed countries and family farms with access to know-how, technology and innovation, while pro-poor technology and innovation must be developed and made available through technology transfer and other means.

20.   Average access to electricity in least developed countries was 51 per cent in 2018. Furthermore, 85 per cent of the population in least developed countries had no access to clean fuels and technologies and relied on biomass fuels for cooking, which were hazardous to health and to the environment. Investment in sustainable

energy was therefore key to innovation and growth in technology investment in the least developed countries.

21. The work of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries was of vital importance. The Group appreciated the contributions made to the Bank and called upon all Member States, especially donor countries and other development partners, to make substantive contributions to the Bank for its effective functioning. The Group also urged Member States to raise awareness of the Bank's activities in their countries and to collaborate with it to ensure the use of technology as a critical tool for development.

22. While developed countries and countries at the technological frontier were dealing with the opportunities and challenges presented by frontier technologies, many developing countries, especially least developed countries, were yet to reap the benefits. Furthermore, a rapidly widening digital divide threatened to leave the least developed countries even further behind. They required access to modern electricity, broadband Internet, an appropriate level of education and an enabling regulatory environment to have any chance at sustainable development.

23. **Ms. Tiwet** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that ASEAN welcomed the progress made regarding access to and the use and application of ICTs. However, much more needed to be done to achieve connectivity for all and to maximize the value of ICTs in sustainable development. Effective policy development and programme design would be required to realize the potential of information technology to enhance development, inclusion and empowerment.

24. The value of ICTs had been acknowledged in a number of ASEAN documents, including the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025. ASEAN recognized that ICTs played a major role in enhancing connectivity and in fostering the growth and integration of the region's economies.

25. ASEAN had been taking measures to address development gaps in the region and to further improve digital connectivity and accessibility, in particular through the adoption of ICT masterplans for the periods 2010–2015 and 2016–2020. It was currently developing a digital masterplan 2025, which would aim to address the horizontal implications of digital transformation in the region and contribute to positioning ASEAN as a single integrated market able to attract more investment, talent and participation.

26. The region was also striving to enhance regional connectivity through its "Connecting the connectivities" initiative as well through full operationalization of the ASEAN Single Window to facilitate intraregional trade and the ASEAN Smart Cities Network.

27. In light of the growing sophistication and transboundary nature of cyberthreats, ASEAN was committed to strengthening the region's cybersecurity in a holistic manner and recognized the vital importance of cybersecurity coordination across the pillars of the ASEAN Community. A new era for ASEAN would require the successful implementation of a new ICT vision to meet the growing aspirations of ASEAN citizens.

28. **Ms. Beckles** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the Community continued to face unique development challenges. Narrow resource bases, limited economies of scale, dependence on external markets and fragile natural environments left small island developing States acutely vulnerable to exogenous shocks in global markets and to the impact of unmitigated climate change and natural disasters.

29. Advances in technology and innovation provided opportunities for small island developing States to overcome their inherent limitations. The transformative potential of technological platforms and innovative solutions could be harnessed to develop globally connected knowledge spaces, which could in turn advance efforts to reduce poverty, achieve climate change adaptation and mitigation and accelerate progress towards education, health and gender equality goals.

30. The work of the United Nations and ITU remained crucial to building a people-centred and development-oriented digital space and information society. CARICOM welcomed the progress made in closely aligning the World Summit on the Information Society process and the 2030 Agenda, in particular in operationalizing the three components of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism.

31. CARICOM continued to position itself to take full advantage of opportunities in technology and innovation through the CARICOM Single ICT Space, which aimed to attract investment in technology, harmonize related legislative frameworks and foster digital commerce, entrepreneurship, job creation and innovation. For 2020, the region was planning to develop a comprehensive work programme for the Single ICT Space, a digital skills framework and regional policy and guidelines. A workshop on ICT indicators had been held in Trinidad in April 2019, which had built the capacity of countries

in the region to produce ICT indicators and statistics and facilitated discussions on data gaps in the region.

32. Despite regional and national efforts to utilize information technology to advance sustainable development ambitions, accelerated technological change had widened the digital divide between the global North and South. The bases of international competitive advantage had evolved in favour of those able to innovate and create knowledge and technological applications.

33. Access to affordable and reliable technologies and services remained a critical challenge for small island developing States. They must be supported in scientific cooperation, innovation and capacity-building, including through technology development, transfer and dissemination, and accessible financing and investment.

34. ICTs had also brought about new security and rights-based challenges, including on cybersecurity and Internet governance. CARICOM remained committed to the development of ICTs for peaceful purposes and to improving inclusive access, and welcomed innovative partnerships that would support the achievement of those goals. Through national and regional initiatives, the States members of CARICOM were furthering the incorporation of ICTs into their national strategies to achieve sustainable and inclusive development.

35. The digital divide between and within countries was widening. Therefore, as the international community made strides in harnessing the potential of ICTs for sustainable development, strategies must be implemented to bridge the digital divide and build an inclusive knowledge-based global society that gave everyone, in particular the most vulnerable, the opportunity to engage actively in the digital era.

36. **Mr**. **Konstantinopolskiy** (Russian Federation) said that the implementation of the decisions of the World Summit on the Information Society was directly linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Digitalization played an important role in building an information society by introducing new trends in areas such as trade and economic relations, employment, education and scientific development. Ensuring ICT security and enhancing international cooperation on the development of a universally recognized legal framework for cyberspace under the auspices of the United Nations were more relevant than ever. An ethical and prudent approach to the adoption of innovations such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of things and robot technology was needed in order to bridge the digital divide. The Russian Federation welcomed the work of ITU and other United Nations agencies carrying out work related to ICT development, including UNCTAD and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It also welcomed the work of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, which served as the coordinating platform for follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society.

37. His Government attached great importance to the integration of ICTs into all aspects of life in the Russian Federation. Every Russian citizen had on average two mobile phone accounts. Among the adult population, 76 per cent had broadband Internet access, 53 per cent used mobile Internet, more than 60 per cent used Internet services on a daily basis and two thirds received electronic State services. Over the past year alone, the number of users of the State services portal had increased to 21 million. The aims of the national digital economy project were, by 2024, to triple domestic expenditure on the development of the digital economy, to achieve 100 per cent broadband Internet access for major social infrastructure and to bring the percentage of households with broadband Internet access up to 97 per cent. It was envisaged that 10 million Russians would be able to take online courses to raise their digital literacy. At the regional level, the Russian Federation was working with the Eurasian Economic Union to implement its digital agenda.

38. *Ms. Fisher-Tsin (Israel), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

39. **Mr. Mula** (Indonesia) said that ICTs and connectivity had great potential to accelerate the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and to address development challenges. Transformational changes were taking place as long-distance communications were becoming more accessible. Although access to ICTs continued to increase worldwide, progress remained uneven, especially when comparing developed and developing countries.

40. The benefits of ICTs must be extended to all while managing associated risks. There was a need for increased investments in Internet and telephone servers, networks and capabilities. Access to that infrastructure would improve access to information, thus leading to higher productivity and empowering those left behind. Affordable and broad access to ICTs must be ensured, especially for those living in rural and remote areas as it could improve their livelihoods. Skilled human resources were required to ensure the strategic use of ICTs. Promoting digital literacy and capacity through education for all must continue to be a priority. Multi-stakeholder cooperation should be enhanced to address the challenges of high costs, poor connectivity and lack

of necessary skills, which were keeping people from benefiting from ICTs.

41. Indonesia had adopted several policies to promote ICT infrastructure and capabilities, such as the deployment of a national high-capacity backbone network providing high-speed Internet access that reached remote areas and the implementation of programmes to develop a digital start-up ecosystem, nurture digital literacy and digitalize micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises.

42. **Mr. Imbert** (Monaco) said that, with a view to transforming Monaco into a "smart nation", the Extended Monaco programme had been unveiled in April 2019. As part of its efforts to become a fully digitalized nation, Monaco was deploying essential infrastructure such as a sovereign cloud and a high-speed Internet network across the country. The Government would support smart city projects to optimize its management of the territory, in particular in the areas of mobility and energy. A country of innovation, Monaco had launched self-driving vehicles under real conditions.

43. Monaco strove to be a nation that funded progress, in particular in the area of climate technologies. The Government had reaffirmed its objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 and of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. To finance projects that would change the world, Monaco was relying on blockchain and initial coin offerings, and hoped to become a global leader in environmental initial coin offerings. In 2019, it had launched an initial coin offering dedicated to the production of new documentary films by the Oscar-winning director Luc Jacquet.

44. The Government was also focusing on e-health and e-education, including training for all in computer coding beginning in primary school. It was implementing projects that would place the user at the heart of public services, such as the development of e-administration by computerizing all relevant administrative procedures by 2022, which would ensure high-quality, modern and effective public services.

45. **Ms. Cue Delgado** (Cuba) said that, although the resources needed to eliminate the digital divide existed at the global level, developed countries needed to demonstrate political will and commitment through financing, investment, training, infrastructure creation, knowledge dissemination and the transfer of intellectual property and technology. ICTs should be used in the service of development, peace and the spread of knowledge and to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and social exclusion, not as an instrument of war, interventionism, destabilization, subversion, unilateralism or terrorism.

46. Subversion continued to be an essential part of the policy of the United States of America against Cuba. The Cuba Internet Task Force had been established with a view to subverting the internal order of Cuba and destabilizing the country. Her Government did not need any advice from the Government of the United States on advancing the digitalization of Cuban society. It had already been implementing a national development plan in spite of the economic, commercial and financial embargo that had been imposed by the United States on Cuba for more than half a century. That policy, which had intensified over the past year, was the main impediment to wider access to the Internet and ICTs by Cubans, as it hindered and increased the cost of connectivity and used cyberspace to subvert the Cuban political and legal system.

47. Given the growth of the Internet as an open, interconnected and transnational space, its use and development were accompanied by technical, economic and social risks. Decision-making in that new space therefore required the participation of all. International bodies played an important role in providing space for collaborating and reaching agreement on technical issues and for exchanging information. With regard to Internet governance, the ultimate goal was to ensure the stable and secure functioning of the Internet, its quality and affordability, universal access and its use on the basis of mutual respect between and towards all those involved. Any model that was employed to that end must enable and facilitate human development and social inclusion.

48. **Ms. Teo** (Singapore) said that, since the launch of its Smart Nation initiative in 2014, her country had made significant strides in its digitalization journey. The Government was fostering close partnerships with the private sector to drive growth in the digital economy. It had recently established the Digital Industry Singapore office, which served as a first stop for enterprises seeking assistance on digital issues. The Government was spearheading a public-private partnership model to promote the delivery of projects to bring broader benefits to the country's digital ecosystem. For instance, its partnership with the ride-sharing firm Grab had led to the establishment of a research centre in Singapore and would result in further collaborations to empower local digital content creators.

49. Governments must foster confidence in the digital realm, with a view to encouraging information flow and innovation, without compromising personal data protection and cybersecurity. Another concern was how

to approach ethical and governance issues relating to the application of emerging technologies. Her Government had developed a model artificial intelligence governance framework, which provided private sector entities with balanced parameters for the responsible and safe deployment of artificial intelligence solutions. Together with like-minded countries, Singapore had proposed a Digital Economy Agreement to address current policy gaps and emerging issues pertaining to the digital economy.

50. In addition to investing in digital access and literacy, her Government encouraged all sectors of society to participate in influencing the effect of technology on their lives. Citizens of Singapore were mobilized as community champions for digital technology. Through various initiatives, senior citizens were empowered to help their peers to embrace digital services and gain confidence in using technology. Such inclusive innovation created a sense of ownership and contributed to an increased and sustainable adoption of digital services. Singapore had sought to embrace all aspects of a digital nation that leveraged technology for sustainable development. As it worked to implement the 2030 Agenda, a whole-of-society approach would be central to its promise to leave no one behind.

51. **Mr. Al-Qahtani** (Qatar) said that efforts must be made to ensure equal access for all to new technologies. His Government was working to utilize the potential of ICTs, considering them to be an enabler of the attainment of sustainable development. Recognizing the key role of ICTs in access to information, knowledge and basic services, the Government had adopted policies to promote the ICT sector. The Ministry of Transport and Communications was building an active, safe and secure ICT sector, with a view to serving the interests of all through e-government and cybersecurity. In the light of the rise in cyberthreats across the world, the Ministry had launched a number of initiatives to protect ICT systems and infrastructure in Qatar. The Ministry was organizing the fifth Qatar information technology exhibition and conference, to be held from 29 October to 1 November 2019.

52. His Government harnessed ICTs to empower persons with disabilities and help them to attain independence and self-reliance. For example, it had established a technology centre for assisting persons with disabilities that strove to ensure equal opportunities for them in education and employment. The Qatar Science and Technology Park, which was part of the research and development community, served as the main platform for innovative technology projects and sought to enhance entrepreneurship and innovation.

53. Cybercrimes and piracy must be addressed not simply by prosecuting entities that used piracy for political purposes but also as a threat to international peace and security. Measures for creating a safe digital space and combating cybercrime had been recommended in the Doha Declaration on Integrating Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice into the Wider United Nations Agenda to Address Social and Economic Challenges and to Promote the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, and Public Participation. Having been a victim of cybercrime, Qatar was making tremendous efforts in cybersecurity and had updated relevant national legislation. Qatar had also declared its willingness to host an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations to examine cybersecurity on the basis of the provisions of international law.

54. **Mr. Ogwa** (Nigeria) said that his delegation welcomed the establishment by the Secretary-General of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation and hoped that it would engender a global multi-stakeholder dialogue on how to ensure that the ongoing revolution in digital technologies would help to advance human well-being.

55. Recognizing technology innovation as an option for poverty eradication, his Government had hosted the Nigeria Smart City Summit in 2017 with the intention of eliciting the commitment of investors to accelerate the digital transformation agenda in the country. The Government had also adopted an ICT sector road map with a view to addressing the key challenges plaguing the ICT sector, improving infrastructure and the quality of services, and supporting e-commerce. An advisory group on technology and creativity had also been established. Nigeria was growing its entrepreneurial ecosystem in the technology sector through the establishment of public and private sector-led incubator technology hubs, youth innovation programmes and science technology parks. The Government was using ICT to drive transparency in governance and ensure cost effectiveness in public service delivery.

56. The increase in access to new technology was accompanied by opportunities for leveraging ICT to extend timely information and services to previously underserved people. Capacity-building for the productive use of ICT should be given due consideration in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, given the direct impact of ICT on the ability of Member States to improve the economic well-being of their people. All stakeholders should work together to achieve a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, in accordance with the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society and the 2030

Agenda. Steps should be taken to bridge the digital divide, in particular between countries. Member-States and the United Nations system should ensure that the benefits of ICTs, including new technologies, were available to all regions and countries. All Member States should use ICT to combat illicit financial flows and to reduce to the barest minimum the costs of the recovery of illicit funds and stolen assets.

57.   **Ms. Panabokke** (Sri Lanka) said that, with the unfolding of the fourth industrial revolution, innovative ICTs and frontier technologies were giving rise to opportunities to address development challenges. However, innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence must be harnessed in a balanced and integrated manner to advance the 2030 Agenda. In that regard, her delegation welcomed the Committee's annual resolution on ICTs for sustainable development. Solutions to address the digital divide must be incorporated into global initiatives on sustainable development. International efforts should be enhanced to provide education and capacity-building to developing countries so that they could derive optimal gains from ICTs. In that regard, Sri Lanka welcomed the outcome of the twenty-second session of the Commission on Science and Technology Development.

58.   Although rapid technological innovation had created greater employment opportunities, such developments also threatened to replace existing jobs. Countries must adapt to those changes by making the required adjustments to school curricula and workplace training in order to build the skills needed for the workplace of the future. Aware of that need, her Government had identified flagship programmes and priority projects under the national digital economic strategy for 2018–2025 to create skilled workers and promote the development of the ICT industry and other vital sectors, such as tourism, manufacturing and agriculture.

59.   Developing countries lacked appropriate legislation to protect their citizens from cyberthreats. Enhanced cooperation among countries was therefore needed to develop appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks. Processes were also needed to address the ethical aspects arising from developments in ICTs, in particular with regard to social media. Social media platforms should be subject to a code of conduct to regulate their obligation to tackle intolerance and hate online.

60.   **Ms. Jiarpinitnun** (Thailand) said that new challenges in the application of ICTs concerning cybersecurity, the protection of personal data and privacy, and the growing decision-making power of devices and algorithms required greater understanding, innovations in governance and business management, and enhanced collaboration. Her Government had been implementing an economic and social development policy with the aims of transforming the country into a values-based and innovation-driven economy, reducing socioeconomic disparities and creating sustainability through the use of environmentally sound technology. Under the policy, the Government had been installing affordable high-speed broadband Internet in villages throughout Thailand since 2017, allowing people in remote areas to access services such as e-commerce, e-education and e-health; more than 6.6 million users had been reached as at July 2019.

61.   Thailand had partnered with global tech companies, such as Google, Microsoft, Cisco and Huawei, to design a curriculum encompassing upskilling, reskilling and the teaching of new digital knowledge and skills. The curriculum would be mainstreamed in major universities with the aim of producing 40,000 digital and high-tech workers by 2022. In addition, a volunteer network had been established to improve public knowledge of digital technology, with more than 1,000 volunteers being trained to support their local communities. In early 2019, the Cybersecurity Act and the Personal Data Protection Act had entered into force in tandem with the establishment of a national cybersecurity agency. Amendments had also been made to the Electronic Transactions Act to improve safety and security for e-transactions and e-service businesses.

62.   As the Chair of ASEAN, Thailand would launch an ASEAN digital integration framework action plan with a view to promoting digital innovation in the region and advancing the region's digital integration.

63.   **Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh) said that recent breakthroughs in ICTs could give rise to solutions and opportunities for sustainable development that were better, cheaper, faster and scalable. However, while developed countries were grappling with the opportunities associated with frontier technologies, many developing countries had yet to reap the benefits of those technologies. There was therefore a risk of a new wave of digital divide between developed and developing countries. Increased connectivity also came with an increased risk of cyberattacks and other related crimes, which had become more sophisticated and pervasive.

64.   Bangladesh had embraced ICTs for its economic and social development, helping it to progress from a low-income to a middle-income country. The Government was focusing on the critical foundations of

a sustainable digital economy, namely, digital inclusion, digital finance, digital information systems and advanced data. Through a Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment, UNCTAD had highlighted the improvements made by Bangladesh in telecommunications infrastructure, trade logistics, payment solutions, laws and regulations, and skills development and financing. The Government was committed to digitalizing all commercial activities and to making all existing business laws, regulations and policies compatible with the digital commerce revolution. The Government had made good progress in building up its cybersecurity capabilities, including through the formulation of a national cybersecurity strategy. In 2019, the Parliament had ratified the Digital Security Act.

65. There had been an unprecedented surge of interest in machine learning and artificial intelligence technologies, which allowed computers to make data-derived predictions and automate decisions. Such tools must be utilized to address development challenges in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. However, developing countries must be supported in developing the skills of their workforce to prevent the advent of such technologies from affecting their job markets and leading to further inequality and exclusion.

66. **Ms. Zahir** (Maldives) said that the geographic profile of Maldives, as a small island nation with more than 1,100 islands scattered across the Indian Ocean, posed significant challenges for enhancing inter-island and inter-atoll connectivity. The extreme dispersal of the population, combined with inherent constraints in transportation systems among certain islands, resulted in diseconomies of scale and higher service delivery costs. Nevertheless, the unique spatial profile of Maldives meant that there was significant potential for ICT to be leveraged to unleash developmental gains. Recognizing the redefined social and economic landscape of the country, the President had established the Ministry of Communication, Science and Technology.

67. The recently launched five-year strategic action plan of the Government had laid a clear path for ICT development, with five key priorities. First, the Government was seeking to modernize the governance mechanism of the ICT sector to prepare the country for a digital economy. The second priority was to establish digital infrastructure, platforms and ecosystems capable of providing ICT solutions that were more efficient, secure and consistent. Third, the Government would modernize its services through digitalization to allow for data-driven policymaking and the efficient delivery of information and services. Fourth, by ensuring

affordable and high-quality Internet services nationwide and promoting investment in emerging technologies, the Government hoped to encourage digital innovation and to create an environment conducive for businesses to thrive in a digital economy. Lastly, the Government was focused on developing a digital-ready workforce and building capacity in the ICT industry by mainstreaming science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the national curriculum and increasing the participation of women in ICT.

68. The spread of extremist and terrorist content online was an impediment to sustainable development. Maldives had been proud to support the Christchurch Call to Action to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online during the high-level week of the General Assembly held in September 2019. Maldives remained committed to working towards achieving the vision of the World Summit on the Information Society of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, while at the same time unlocking the potential of ICT to assist in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

69. **Ms. Deluera Canchola** (Mexico), speaking as a youth delegate, said that human talent must be successfully combined with technological progress. Education systems should offer more courses on coding and analytical thinking, focus on cultivating skills to enable people to adapt to changing environments and provide lifelong learning opportunities.

70. Mexico had been a pioneer in promoting discussions within the United Nations regarding the impact of emerging technologies on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The knowledge generated through the Expert Group Meeting on Exponential Technological Change, Automation and Their Policy Implications for Sustainable Development, in which more than 60 countries had participated, had led to more fruitful discussions. Mexico welcomed the leading example set by the Secretary-General in that area and noted that the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and other agencies were already working with cutting-edge technologies and sharing lessons learned. The United Nations should serve as the centre for international cooperation, as it could unite the efforts of different stakeholders and channel technological development for the good of humanity and sustainable development.

71. The Technology Facilitation Mechanism must be made fully operational. Its online platform, bringing together information on initiatives, mechanisms and programmes in the area of science, technology and innovation, would serve as an inventory of good

practices and public policies available to anyone interested in applying them in their countries. Despite the efforts of the Secretariat in 2018 to launch the platform, which would bring obvious benefits, it was still not up and running owing to a lack of resources. During the current session, Member States must decide to make the Mechanism operational and to seek financing for it.

72. The follow-up to the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation offered an opportunity to take a holistic view of development issues and to reap the benefits of the age of digital interdependence. Mexico would focus its efforts on bridging the digital divide. Rather than being used to exacerbate inequality, technologies should be used to accelerate equal opportunities.

73. The Committee would consider three draft resolutions at the current session related to the use of technologies for sustainable development, each of which fell under a different agenda item. Discussing them all under one item in future would ensure greater consistency.

74. **Mr. He** Fuxiang (China) said that the important role of ICTs in the promotion of sustainable development should be fully leveraged. Awareness of the importance of ICTs for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should be enhanced at the international, regional and national levels. China commended the Secretary-General for establishing the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, carrying out extensive consultations on strengthening digital cooperation and providing advice on international cooperation in ICTs.

75. Developing countries should be assisted in bridging the digital divide by strengthening capacity-building. Only 20 per cent of individuals in least developed countries used the Internet, while the comparable figure for developed countries was more than 80 per cent. ICTs should be promoted globally, especially in developing countries, and ICT literacy among the public should be improved to bridge the digital divide. International development assistance should focus on ICTs to help developing countries to develop ICT infrastructure. North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation in ICTs should be strengthened to improve global partnerships. Developed countries should provide more funding and technologies to developing countries to help to improve their public ICT and network technology capabilities.

76. The Government of China was vigorously promoting a national ICT development strategy and international cooperation in cyberspace to promote ICT development, the digital economy, new industrialization, urbanization and the modernization of agriculture and to achieve common development. The Government was accelerating the deployment of 5G and improving ICT facilities. It had utilized ICTs and network technology in poverty alleviation and in bridging the digital divide and the development gap between urban and rural areas. It had established six innovation centres for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. China was willing to strengthen cooperation with other countries to share the development opportunities presented by ICTs and a digital economy, with a view to building a community with a shared future in ICTs and network technology.

77. **Mr. Poudel Chhetri** (Nepal) said that the progress made in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society was far below that required to achieve its vision beyond 2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Those outcomes, including the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, must be implemented in synergy with the 2030 Agenda.

78. The availability, accessibility and affordability of ICTs were essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 9.c on universal access to ICT. To that end, greater cooperation was needed to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries, in particular least developed and landlocked developing countries; between urban and rural contexts; and between men and women. Specifically, a multi-stakeholder approach, with a focus on the leading role of the private sector in the area of ICT, should be taken. More investment in ICT infrastructure, technology transfers and ICT skills was also important. Furthermore, the full operationalization of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, and support for the work of ITU, were essential.

79. His Government sought to transform Nepal into an information- and knowledge-based society and economy, in line with the country's aspiration towards rapid economic growth and development. The Government's ICT policy took into account the national context, and the 2019 Digital Nepal Framework was being implemented in order to fully unlock the country's growth potential. While ICTs had contributed to considerable progress in the areas of disaster risk reduction, public service delivery and good governance, further progress would depend on adequate ICT knowledge, expertise, resources and capacity-building.

80. Greater cooperation was required to leverage the opportunities offered, and respond to the challenges posed, by ICT. Specifically, efforts must be made to

address the transformative impact of digitalization, as well as the risks posed by frontier technologies and their effects on the nature and quality of employment relationships. The benefits of e-commerce, in particular for landlocked developing countries, should be harnessed. In that connection, he thanked UNCTAD for supporting Nepal in conducting its rapid e-Trade readiness assessment. Legislative gaps in the areas of cybersecurity and online privacy needed to be addressed in order to strengthen Internet governance. The inextricable link between information and knowledge, as well as the irreplaceability of human relations, must also be acknowledged.

81. **Mr. Kumar** (India) said that ICTs had transformed governance, communication and business by fostering a digitally connected world. Technological innovations such as high-speed broadband Internet, artificial intelligence, cloud computing and big data analysis had had a defining impact on a broad range of economic and social sectors. Those developments had nevertheless given rise to challenges related to access, affordability, content, capabilities and legal and regulatory frameworks. Indeed, more than 80 per cent of people in developed countries used the Internet, compared with less than 35 per cent in developing countries. That gap must be addressed in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

82. His Government had used ICTs to improve public services, citizen engagement, transparency and accountability through initiatives such as Digital India, Make in India and Startup India. The Digital India campaign was aimed at empowering and providing each citizen with digital infrastructure, and at strengthening e-governance. India currently had the second largest Internet subscriber base in the world, and it was estimated that Digital India initiatives could boost the country's GDP by up to $1 trillion by 2025.

83. A national digital communications policy adopted in 2018 aimed to provide broadband for all. The domestic e-commerce market had grown by 17 per cent in 2018; as much as two thirds of that growth had been achieved as a result of increasing Internet and smartphone penetration to rural India. By 2025, the country's digital economy could reach between $800 billion and $1 trillion.

84. With regard to financial inclusion, the number of bank accounts held in India had doubled in the past 7 years, with more than 80 per cent of adults currently holding such accounts. The *Aadhar* biometric individual identification system had also promoted inclusion and innovation in the delivery of financial services. Under that system, around 1.3 billion citizens had been issued

unique identity cards, and a cash benefit transfer scheme had enabled over 370 million new bank accounts to be opened for the poor. ICT tools were also being deployed to improve the quality of, and access to, education and health-care services, including through tele-education and telemedicine. In particular, an application called e-VIN was providing real-time access to information about the availability of specialized vaccines.

85. India had launched an online dashboard for monitoring the progress of its states in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. India would also implement the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. In keeping with the spirit of South-South cooperation, India was working with other developing countries to facilitate capacity-building in the use of ICTs for development purposes. Global partnerships should be strengthened to harness ICT tools in order to accelerate the achievement of the Goals.

86. **Ms. Muigai** (Kenya) said that her delegation had been pleased to learn that, in 2018, for the first time, the number of individuals estimated to use the Internet had exceeded half the global population. However, it was deeply concerned that, in sub-Saharan Africa, less than 25 of the population used the Internet, while, in other parts of the world, the average rate of usage exceeded the global average. Greater efforts were therefore required to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries. In addition, the digital capabilities of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises needed to be strengthened to enable them to leverage global platforms, and gaps in Internet access between men and women, which were widest in poorer countries, needed to be addressed. National policies relating to intellectual property rights, competition and digital taxation also needed to be strengthened. As recognized in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the 2030 Agenda, technology was an important non-financial means of achieving global development objectives. Kenya welcomed the annual multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals.

87. ICTs played a pivotal role in virtually all sectors in Kenya and were enabling efficient and effective delivery of services, including e-government and customer services, and speedy dissemination of information. A policy and regulatory environment conducive to competition had stimulated massive investment in ICT infrastructure which, in turn, had resulted in a significant uptake of ICT services in the country, with mobile and Internet subscription rates increasing rapidly.

88. ICTs were a key driver of Kenya's Vision 2030, a development road map aimed at transforming the country into a newly industrializing, middle-income economy by 2030. It was envisaged that the provision of access to quality, affordable and reliable ICT services would transform Kenya into a knowledge- and information-based economy, catalysing its economic and social development. The Government had identified countrywide broadband connectivity by 2020 as a priority for national development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government had thus continued to expand fibre-optic Internet backbone infrastructure in order to facilitate the provision of e-services to all counties. It was expected that such broad-based connectivity would contribute to the provision of last-mile ICT services; bridge the digital divide; increase the uptake of e-government services; reduce the cost of doing business; and stimulate business opportunities in rural areas, thereby lifting vulnerable communities out of poverty. In addition, to promote early computer literacy, the Government was providing laptops to children at the primary-school level and was investing in the development of digital skills among youth to ensure that they had the expertise required by the digital economy.

89. The ICT sector was flourishing in Kenya, which had one of the highest Internet penetration rates in Africa, at 86 per cent. Kenya was also among the most advanced countries on the continent in the area of ICT innovation, as evidenced by the broad-based implementation of mobile money-transfer services, which had drastically increased financial inclusion. Kenya also hosted the first IBM research lab in Africa and the regional headquarters of Nokia. In addition, the Government planned to build a $7-billion, 5,000-acre technology city inspired by Silicon Valley. The Government's vision was for Kenya to become a regional ICT hub and a globally competitive digital economy based on partnership, equity and non-discrimination, technology neutrality, environmental protection and conservation, good governance and incentivizing.

90. **Mr. Issetov** (Kazakhstan) said that while Kazakhstan welcomed the increasing number of people around the world using the Internet, gross inequities remained. In particular, Africa, the least developed countries, conflict-prone and post-conflict countries and many middle-income countries were still lagging behind in the social, economic and technological spheres. Given the critical role of private-sector businesses in financing ICT infrastructure and deploying networks, enhanced coordination was needed between ITU, UNCTAD, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Bank and other international agencies, on the one hand, and private investors, on the other.

91. The Digital Kazakhstan programme, adopted in 2017, was aimed at achieving sustainable economic growth, increasing the competitiveness of the economy and improving the population's quality of life through the development of digital technologies. According to the results of the 2018 United Nations E-Government Survey, Kazakhstan had ranked thirty-ninth in the area of e-government development. It aimed to build on that success by continuing to promote the Digital Kazakhstan programme and successful information technology initiatives at the national level and abroad. One such initiative was a project to create digital factories, in which $19 million was expected to be invested by 2022. Moreover, the introduction of digital technologies was expected to increase average labour productivity by 10 per cent.

92. Kazakhstan also aimed to develop high-speed and secure infrastructure to support access to the Internet, mobile networks and data. In 2019, the rate of broadband penetration in households had reached 83.9 per cent, and broadband access was expected to be provided to 1,250 rural settlements by 2022. In addition, the digital literacy rate had reached 79.6 per cent in 2019. Astana Information Technology University, established in September 2019, was geared towards train students to contribute to sustainable and predictable digital development in Kazakhstan and the Central Asian region. Furthermore, 124 startup projects had been initiated under the Astana hub since 2018. Three of those projects had attracted investments totalling $1.6 million in 2019.

93. Access to digital networks had provided new opportunities for development in a broad range of sectors, in particular for poverty eradication, the achievement of gender parity, the strengthening of human capital and the reduction of inequalities. In order to ensure the long-term and inclusive achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals, it was necessary to promote North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation aimed at ensuring equal access to digital technologies.

94. **Mr. Henckert** (Namibia) said that his delegation welcomed the report of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation entitled "The Age of Digital Interdependence". Namibia appreciated the expansion of access to ICT, as well as the values identified by the Panel as important for shaping the development of digital cooperation. Motivated by its belief that ICTs

were not merely economic enablers, but could be important economic drivers, Namibia had implemented programmes to enhance the potential of new technologies to accelerate economic development, promote job creation, in particular among women and youth, and build an inclusive, knowledge-based society.

95.   In line with its policy on international relations and cooperation and its South-South cooperation strategy, the Government of Namibia had provided funding for the joint production, by the Namibia Film Commission and the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts of Argentina, of the film *The Hidden Sky*, thus enabling the creation of 100 local jobs and the provision of training in filmmaking. In October 2019, in order to expand digital coverage and reduce the digital divide nationwide, the Government had hosted its sixth national ICT summit under the theme "Accelerating digital transformation in Namibia". That summit had provided a platform to discuss recent trends in ICT, partnership-building, knowledge-sharing and the formulation of a policy aimed at developing the local ICT industry.

96.   Efforts to promote ICT should focus on implementing the 2030 Agenda. In that regard, countries should work together to prevent the inappropriate use of technologies to foster hatred and incite violence; promote the suitable application of technologies for the benefit of people; and address the trust deficit in digital cooperation identified by the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. Technologies were also required to address the drought and desertification situations faced by Namibia.

97.   Namibia supported the efforts of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries to carry out science, technology and innovation reviews, support research collaboration and build capacity among tertiary-level institutions, in particular in developing countries. The growth of the ICT sector should be a national priority, with the understanding that long-term growth could only be achieved through a demand-driven approach based on education and training, and underpinned by a conducive environment. Science, technology and innovation should therefore be an integral part of national development strategies and should be promoted in a coordinated and coherent manner.

98.   **Ms. Yarosh** (Ukraine) said that modern technologies offered new opportunities in the areas of development, ecological protection, education and governance, providing prospective solutions to many social, economic and environmental challenges. As a potential driver of sustainable economic growth,

digitalization must be a priority of State policy. Ukraine was grateful for the assistance provided by its partners for cooperation between the public and private sectors in the application of international best practices in digitalization and governance modernization.

99.   Full digitalization of all socially-essential spheres of life was one of the main priorities of the Government of Ukraine. A ministry and a parliamentary committee on digital transformation, both responsible for overseeing State policy on the digitalization sector, the development of the digital economy and e-governance, had been established in 2019. In view of the leading role of private-sector businesses in financing ICT infrastructure and deploying networks, Ukraine was strengthening the national legal framework to foster favourable conditions for the development of the information technology sector, harness the country's scientific and technical potential, and promote active cooperation on information technology with businesses, public organizations and society. It would also be necessary to adapt relevant laws to enhance the protection of personal data and reform the information-security system.

100.   The Government had launched a project to make all public services available online over the next three years. That project would ensure that all related information was understandable and transparent, and that authorities had access to reliable data to inform their decision-making. The Government was also focusing on developing smart and mobile identification technology, with the support of international partners. In addition, it aimed to provide high-speed access to the Internet, including social media websites, to all communities, and to connect 95 per cent of transportation infrastructure to the mobile Internet. Another priority was to involve 6 million Ukrainians in digital skills and competency development programmes in order to prepare them for a job market shaped by evolving technology, and to reap the developmental benefits of technological innovation.

101.   Ukraine sought to attract investments and harness advanced innovations to implement joint projects on the development of the digital economy. Cooperation between countries and the dissemination of innovations and new technologies would help to bridge gaps in sustainable development at the national level. Lastly, frontier technologies could accelerate the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals by transforming economies and improving standards of living.

102.   **Mr. Grigoryan** (Armenia) said that his delegation took note of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/74/62−E/2019/6). Owing to their cross-cutting nature, ICTs could accelerate

sustainable development and were empowering millions by enabling more effective use of resources and providing access to education, health care and a broad range of services.

103. Armenia had a very high rate of Internet penetration and a thriving ICT industry. ICT was a strategic priority of the Government, and the national laws ensured favourable conditions for foreign direct investment in the ICT sector. Consistent efforts had also been made to promote the development of cutting-edge innovation, as well as ICT ecosystems and startups. Technology startups were granted tax benefits and would be exempt from income tax by 2023. As a result, growth in the ICT sector had quintupled in the past seven years, increasing at a sustained annual rate of 25 per cent. In addition, more than 900 ICT companies, including PicsArt and Softconstruct, were headquartered in Armenia.

104. Modernizing the economy, with an emphasis on advancing ICT and fostering innovation and creative education, was the cornerstone of the national development agenda. Promoting the empowerment of youth and building their capacities to be drivers of smart development were particularly essential to enhancing the ICT industry. Indeed, one of the objectives under the national long-term development strategy was to promote equitable and high-quality education, including by encouraging innovation, creative thinking and the use of technologies. The establishment of the TUMO centres for creative technologies and of the Armath engineering laboratories was an important achievement in that regard, enabling thousands of teenagers to learn the foundations of science, technology and engineering and providing them with the tools and resources to develop practical skills in specific areas within those fields.

105. In October 2019, Armenia had hosted the twenty-third World Conference on Information Technology, a platform bringing together ICT associations representing 90 per cent of the ICT industry worldwide. Held under the theme "Fulfilling the promise of the digital age: the power of decentralization," the Conference had been attended by a variety of public and private stakeholders and had focused on recent developments and issues of global interest in the ICT industry. Armenia attached great importance to cooperation with United Nations programmes and agencies, and with regional partners, to advance smart development. It was committed to enhancing collaboration with all partners to promote ICTs, an open Internet and technologically advanced economies in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

106. **Ms. Myo** (Myanmar) said that much remained to be done to address gaps in Internet access and usage between countries and communities. As recognized in the 2030 Agenda, ICTs played a critical role in reducing poverty and inequality, and in accelerating human progress and social development. ICTs also contributed to economic development by fostering new business ventures, promoting financial inclusion and creating job opportunities. The development of ICTs nevertheless posed new challenges, including cybersecurity threats, which had a major impact on Governments and policymakers. Appropriate policies and coordinated strategies at all levels were therefore necessary to maximize the benefits and address the risks of ICTs.

107. Myanmar had taken a number of measures to achieve the 2030 Agenda by advancing the ICT sector. The Government had formulated a policy framework for the development of the ICT industry, enabling telecommunications services to be made available expeditiously to the public at affordable prices throughout the country. The mobile phone penetration rate, equivalent to the number of subscriber identification module (SIM) cards used, exceeded 126 per cent, representing coverage of 95 per cent of the population. Despite having adopted digital technologies relatively recently, Myanmar was enjoying the benefits of its significant leap from an analog system to a 4G digital network, and had achieved noticeable improvements in the affordability and quality of mobile services.

108. A digital economy development committee had been established in 2017, enabling progress in building the digital economy and achieving multisectoral digital transformation. The Myanmar Communications Commission would soon be launched as an independent regulatory body, and a related law had been formulated to ensure the Commission's responsiveness and accountability. To address cyber threats, the Government was drafting a cyber legal framework, including a comprehensive cyber law, with the assistance of the World Bank. Myanmar had also recently launched its own satellite into space, enabling faster connectivity to the mobile Internet and other communication networks countrywide.

109. Advancements in ICT could be highly beneficial to developing countries and, in particular, least developed countries. In the commerce sector, technology could be used to generate revenue and capital income. ICTs could also improve quality of life by creating employment opportunities, enabling the financial inclusion of the poor, and supporting health-care services. Lastly, ICTs facilitated communication

between rural and urban areas, thus helping to bridge developmental gaps.

110. As a least developed country, Myanmar welcomed the establishment of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, which promoted the integration of such countries into the global knowledge-based economy. Myanmar was committed to building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society capable of contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

111. **Ms. El Hilali** (Morocco) said that ICTs were critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to the advancement of human progress. Science, technology and innovation were particularly essential to expanding access to education, employment, health care, agriculture, natural resources such as water, and renewable energy. In accordance with the royal directives issued by its King, Morocco was committed to overcoming the digital divide that affected developing countries and, in particular, African countries.

112. Digitalization provided valuable opportunities for businesses worldwide. Her Government was investing heavily in human and physical capital, and had enacted significant regulatory reforms to transform the country into a knowledge-based economy. While investments in telecommunications networks and higher education were already under way, it remained to be seen how the regulatory framework could be improved to foster a business environment that enabled the private sector to play a leading role in effecting the desired change.

113. The Government sought to ensure that the digital ecosystem supported highly competitive new businesses in Morocco. Youth interested in innovation and digital technology needed support, including for the internationalization of their data applications. To that end, investments from the Government and national banks had enabled the construction of technoparks, industrial centres providing office space and networks for entrepreneurs in the green energy, technology and telecommunications sectors, in major cities such as Casablanca, Rabat and Tangier, with a new centre expected to be established in Agadir in 2019. The business environment had been greatly enriched by data communications infrastructure; a generation of young, qualified digital professionals was required to further develop that infrastructure and adapt it to a rapidly evolving world. To that end, as part of its digital strategy, Morocco was doubling the number of trained digital professionals every year, which would allow it to reach a total of 30,000 by 2020.

114. Morocco welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative to organize a High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation bringing together government experts, the private sector, civil society and academia. It also welcomed his efforts to organize regional consultations on that topic, including in Africa. Global aspirations and vulnerabilities had become profoundly interconnected. Digital technology must be leveraged to achieve the 2030 Agenda, particularly given the relevance of such technology to human rights, security and cooperation among different segments of society. Digital technology fuelled the economy of Morocco by stimulating job creation and improving the delivery of services to citizens.

115. **Ms. Al Hasni** (Oman), speaking as a youth delegate, said that ICTs were essential to achieving sustainable development, promoting smart societies, building the next generation of infrastructure, and ensuring youth employment. In its *Readiness for the Future of Production Report 2018*, the World Economic Forum had assigned high scores to Oman under the "structure of production" and "drivers of production" components of readiness for the future of production. That achievement was partly attributable to national strategies adopted since 2011 to enable Oman to respond to the demands of the fourth industrial revolution, including a digital strategy, a broadband strategy, an innovation strategy, an e-commerce strategy and an ICT strategy. Those strategies had yielded numerous benefits for society and the business sector, both of which now had effective and seamless access to government services.

116. To keep pace with ICT developments, the Government had established a company aimed at building a national broadband network to meet growing demands. It had also developed a national centre for information security, designed to provide an information security framework to protect users of government and private websites. In addition, it had established a technology fund aimed at promoting investment in startups and innovative ICT solutions in Oman and the Middle East. Through the fund, Oman was collaborating with international companies focusing on high-risk projects in the technology sector. The Government had also hosted a number of conferences, workshops and seminars relating to blockchain technology, artificial intelligence, the Internet of things, and virtual and augmented reality, and was beginning to implement blockchain technology and artificial intelligence. In view of the importance of capacity-building for meeting the evolving demands of the economy and labour markets, the Government had established a programme to train youth to use emerging technologies and harness

their benefits for society. Oman stood ready to work with the United Nations and the international community to acquire the necessary expertise to leverage the potential of ICTs for the benefit of humanity.

117. **Ms. Mufeez** (Bahrain) said that her delegation attached great importance to the development of ICTs and their role in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. According to the results of the 2018 United Nations E-Government Survey, Bahrain had ranked fifth in Asia on e-government development and fourth in the world on the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index. In the 2017 ICT Development Index published by ITU, Bahrain had ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa region and thirty-first in the world.

118. In 2017, Bahrain had become the first Arab country to adopt cloud computing policies. In April 2019, the Amazon Web Services company had established a Middle East and North African regional office in Bahrain. In June 2019, that company had established a Middle East regional data centre in Bahrain as a platform to attract foreign direct investment and support the use of cloud computing technology by entrepreneurs. The expansion of cloud computing at the regional level would depend on the development of a business climate that fostered innovation and entrepreneurship and enabled Bahrain to harness technology to diversify its economy. Such diversification would, in turn, strengthen capacity-building, increase employment and improve government services in accordance with the principles of sustainability, justice and competitiveness set out in the Government's Vision 2030 plan.

119. Measures taken to develop the financial technology industry had included the establishment of a flexible financial technology system and of Bahrain FinTech Bay, one of the largest financial technology centres in the Middle East. The Government had also launched a pilot oversight platform enabling emerging businesses and financial technology companies to provide innovative financial and banking services. In addition, it had enacted laws and regulations on loan crowdfunding in accordance with the requirements of conventional and Islamic banking, a development that was expected to revolutionize the financial technology sector. Furthermore, in 2018, Bahrain had become the first country in the Middle East to adopt open banking services. A leader in the ICT industry, Bahrain would seek to diversify its economy to adapt to future challenges.

120. **Ms. Wynhoven** (International Telecommunication Union (ITU)) said that ITU was committed to connecting all people, wherever they lived and whatever their means. Emerging technologies could help to accelerate human progress; enable innovations in areas such as health care, financial services, disaster risk reduction, education, agriculture, energy and transport; build smart cities and villages; and attain the Sustainable Development Goals. Indeed, in a recent joint report, the organization Global Enabling Sustainability Initiative and the consulting firm Deloitte had demonstrated how digital technologies, if deployed to effect positive social change, could accelerate efforts to achieve each of the Goals by 22 per cent and mitigate downward trends by 23 per cent on average. There was a strong correlation between ICT maturity and level of economic progress. According to the Global System for Mobile Communications Association, mobile technologies and services had generated 4.5 per cent of GDP worldwide in 2017, amounting to $3.6 trillion of economic value added, a figure that was expected to reach $4.6 trillion by 2022.

121. Nevertheless, half of the world's population still did not use the Internet, let alone emerging technologies. If not managed properly, the current wave of technological change might deepen inequalities between those with and without access to digital technologies. The digital divide encompassed gaps in coverage, speed and affordability, and between developing and developed nations, villages and cities, the old and young, and women and men. It was a matter of particular concern that access by women and girls to educational opportunities and labour markets was hindered by inadequate infrastructure, access to ICTs and digital skills.

122. The time had come to invest in key ICT infrastructure and regulatory frameworks, and to address demand-side factors that would enable everyone to harness the benefits of the digital age. Connectivity must be meaningful, affordable, safe and relevant. ITU supported least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in implementing initiatives to increase their capacity to participate in, and benefit from the opportunities offered by, the information society. A recent study by ITU had demonstrated a positive correlation between broadband penetration and economic growth in the most vulnerable countries, a correlation that was stronger in those countries than in other developing countries and in developed countries.

123. The 2019 ITU World Radiocommunication Conference would be held in October and November 2019 in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, and would help to

support the creation of a 5G environment for the rapid development of ICTs. The year 2019 marked the tenth anniversary of the World Summit on the Information Society Forum, which played an important role in facilitating the achievement of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda. Forum 2020 would take place from 6 to 9 April 2020. A more connected and inclusive digital future for all was needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. To that end, ITU was promoting innovation in digital infrastructure, digital literacy, cybersecurity, including child protection online, and the production of local content in local languages.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.