



## Economic and Social Council

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Geneva, 1-26 July 2013

**High-level segment: annual ministerial review**

### **Statement submitted by Information Habitat, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

### **Information and communications technology: critical foundations for a sustainable common future**

The development of widespread, increasingly affordable access to the Internet and mobile phones represents the most critical enabling technology for the transition to sustainability and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals since the 1992 Earth Summit.

- Digital culture: the Internet era has witnessed the development of a culture that strengthens commitment to open access to and sharing of information, open government, open source software and public participation.
- Wireless communications: the exploding use of wireless communications enables unparalleled and timely access to information, markets, telemedicine, and much more in areas and conditions where communications were previously minimal or non-existent. This breakthrough in communications offers numerous savings in energy and carbon dioxide emissions.
- Information infrastructure: the development of affordable and open broadband information infrastructure is an essential component of the transition to sustainable development. Wireless infrastructure, combining satellite access and mesh networking in conjunction with improvised “last-mile” information delivery, is critical and the establishment of universally accessible information infrastructure can allow developing countries to leapfrog the wired technology of developed countries.
- Access to information and participation: during the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, electronic communications became established as the default modality for access to information and the participation of non-governmental organizations in United Nations proceedings; since then, information and communications technology has become an essential medium for participation in the United Nations system and for civic participation at the local, national and international levels.
- Technology transfer: information and communications technology has played a vital role as a medium for the transfer of technology, especially in the free access to the transfer of the information technology itself, in conjunction with open source software, thus enabling free use of an extensive set of tools for building in a digital economy.
- Open government and open data: openness and transparency in government play a key role in enabling broad-based, informed participation in decision-making in sustainable development. The growth of information and communications technology has been a driving force in a growing movement for open government and open access to governmental data, in conjunction with independent development of mobile applications that can provide access to government information in more useful forms than available on government websites.
- Online meeting spaces: one area of information and communications technology that has gained greater appreciation concerning sustainable development is the use of videoconferencing and collaborative documents for

meetings, by governments, businesses and social organizations, providing substantial savings in travel, time and energy and resource use. The use of online meetings needs to be actively promoted, in conjunction with development and strengthening of broadband information infrastructure.

- Natural disaster early warning systems and disaster response: in the context of predictions of increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, information and communications technology-based early warning systems can play a vital role; mobile and GPS-enabled smart phones have a crucial role in disaster recovery.
  - Environmental monitoring: from high-resolution satellite images through real-time monitoring of air and water quality and weather conditions, systematic monitoring of environmental conditions is essential to intelligent responses to environmental conditions.
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