Special Session of the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

Joint Statement

Working together to provide Internet access to the next 1.5 billion by 2020

Davos, 21 January 2016:

"As leaders of government, industry, development and investment organizations from around the world, we believe that global Internet connectivity, specifically global broadband connectivity, is a significant enabler to achieve sustainable development for all.

Access to the Internet is the backbone of the Knowledge Societies that fuel today's digital economies, cultures and education systems. Internet access will accelerate the achievement of the United Nations' [17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)](#).

Today, too few of the world's citizens are connected to the Internet, and even fewer have meaningful access. Currently, only about 3.2 billion people are online[1]. That's less than half of the world's population. In Least Developed Countries, fewer than one in every ten are online.

Just as importantly, *meaningful* Internet access requires relevant, affordable content, available in the right language and offering the capability to transform information into actionable knowledge. Only about 5% of existing languages are accessible online; in addition, the estimated 781 million illiterate adults[2] and almost 100 million children without complete primary education[3] are not able to effectively navigate today's complex websites.

Our goal is to make sure the next 1.5 billion people are connected and have meaningful access to the Internet by 2020. Meaningful access goes beyond mere connectivity to Internet and mobile infrastructure; without the appropriate skills and capacity, people cannot fully benefit from access to ICTs.

Our ambition is in line with the goal of connecting 60% of individuals to the Internet by 2020 – a central target of the [Connect 2020 Agenda](#) set by the 193 Member States of the United Nations specialized agency for ICTs, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), as well as the target set by the US government's [Global Connect](#) initiative.

There are many elements to consider when undertaking the global challenge to connect the world: the need for affordable access to broadband; overcoming challenges to rolling out the required network

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[1] http://www.itu.int/net/pressoffice/press_releases/2015/57.aspx

[2] http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Pages/literacy-data-release-2014.aspx

[3] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf

infrastructure and related financing models; creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment; stimulating the development of local and relevant content and services; developing the capacities of people, including their media and information literacy; and understanding the impact of Internet access in terms of socio-cultural developments, economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Special attention must be paid to enhancing ICT access and skills for the most marginalized groups, including girls and women, and persons with disabilities. The guiding principle for our work must consist in an all-inclusive approach.

No single entity can achieve this important goal and address all of these challenges. Investment and partnerships across multiple sectors are both required, so we must join forces to align existing initiatives.

It is for this reason that the UN Broadband Commission's Special Session in Davos 2016 was convened. Our commitment is to ensure that common goals of global Internet access are fully coordinated and mutually reinforcing, with the aim of maximizing the potential that connectivity can bring to achieve global sustainable development.

Starting here in Davos today we will ensure that this collaboration will build on a range of innovative and important initiatives including: the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development; the World Economic Forum's Future of the Internet Initiative; the GSMA's Connected Society programme; the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS); the US State Department's Global Connect initiative; Connect the World from ONE.org; the Alliance for the Affordable Internet; ITU initiatives to support implementation of the Connect 2020 Agenda; and UNESCO's programmes on ICTs for quality education, and for culture and the sciences – to name but a few.

We will ensure that these and other important industry-driven initiatives continue to strengthen and that the drive to connect the next 1.5 billion people becomes a common and recurring feature at key international fora.

In 2016, we aim to leverage existing and planned events to further our collaboration and common purpose. Some of these global fora include: WEF's 2016 programme of 'Internet for All' events; GSMA's Mobile World Congress in February; the Broadband Commission Spring meeting in March; the US State Department's 'Global Connect' Conference in April; the annual meeting of the World Bank in April; the WSIS Forum in May; the UN-OHRLLS five year review meeting for Least Developed Countries in May, Transform Africa in Kigali in October; ITU Telecom World in November, and more.

The potential that the power of broadband and ICTs can bring as a key driver for sustainable development for everyone must be realized. By aligning our initiatives and joining forces, we will remain fixed and focused on these common connectivity and development goals and ensure collaboration, not competition, in our efforts. By working together we can strive more effectively for full digital and social inclusion."

Statement endorsed by participants at the Special Session of the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, Davos, 21 January 2016