

Statement by IT for Change to the 18th Session of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)

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Thank you chairperson.

We welcome the presentation of the secretariat report on WSIS implementation and look forward to it influencing the WSIS plus review.

Much has undoubtedly changed since the end of WSIS, and there may be a lot to celebrate with respect to the changes that we have witnessed. However, as policy makers congregating at such a global platform as this, perhaps much greater attention needs to be paid to *what has not worked that well*, and where more effort is needed, especially in terms of appropriate policies, and especially with respect to their global dimension. It will be therefore required to focus the WSIS plus 10 review, and CSTD's contribution to it, on this aspect of *what has not worked well, and what needs to be done as we go forward*.

Lets talk about governance of the Internet. Ten years back, if one was to ask an otherwise politically articulate person on the street what are the policy dimensions of the Internet, that person may not have been able to say much. Even at such an early time, we know that the Working Group on IG and the WSIS outcome documents mention a lot of key Internet-related global public policy issues. One has to note with regret that precious little has been done in the last 10 years with respect to developing any kind of democratic approach to addressing these issues. Meanwhile, ten years later, if the same politically articulate person was to be asked the same question today - 'what the person thinks is not all that fine with respect to the Internet and what kind of policy interventions may be needed', one would hear a much more concerned and elaborate account. Numerous serious issues would come to the fore about which we read daily in the newspapers and therefore I would not begin to elaborate them here.

In the circumstances, one can hardly hold that things are largely going in the right directions with regard to the governance of the Internet. *They are not going in the right direction*; with huge centralization of power being witnessed with respect to a socio-technical artefact which was supposed to distribute power more fairly. The global policy makers gathered here today must address this key concern. However, unfortunately, today there is not even an appropriate globally democratic forum to address this key concern. Pressing issues like economics of data, which is the so called 'oil of the new economy', and need for regulating 'global Internet platforms' in public

interest, have simply no home of any kind for globally democratic resolution. And this even when groups of developed countries are seriously pursuing many of these issues among themselves. Developing countries however are not at the policy table, where policies get made which have a default global application due to the global nature of the Internet, and its key nodes being in the developed countries, chiefly the US.

Let me quote from a [news item](#) that I came across just last week.

Earlier this week, the French economic minister Emmanuel Macron and German economic minister Sigmar Gabriel called for a "general regulatory framework for 'essential digital platforms'" in a letter to the commissioner overseeing the reforms.

They wrote: "We believe that the growing power of some digital platforms is a wider challenge that warrants a policy consultation with the aim of establishing an appropriate general regulatory framework for 'essential digital platforms'."

The commission will start the probe "before the end of 2015".

When the EU countries find it of such urgent importance to address the issue of regulating 'essential digital platforms' which we know operate globally, and individual countries have very little policy leverage over them, why would this not also be a concern also at the UN level. ***This is the key question.*** And this is just one among many issues, which one does not have the time to go into now.

Further, one hears a lot, and we heard it in the current CSTD discussion as well, about how we should focus on issues of Internet based development and economic growth and perhaps not so much on Internet governance, which is considered a political issue. We have been through these debates before: and it is today mostly agreed that one cannot talk of development of a society at the expense of its governance – with which we would mean democratic governance. So is it with the Internet. An undemocratically governed Internet cannot contribute to equitable and just development and economic growth. We should accept this to be axiomatic.

While we celebrate the Internet, we must not lose sight of the fact that the last two decades of the rise of the Internet is also the period which has witnessed an exceptionally steep rise in inequality across the world. ***Is there a connection here?*** As we actually have more resources due to technical developments, have our governance systems, including global Internet governance, been failing us? We must address these structure questions.

Therefore, I would urge the CSTD and the WSIS plus 10 review to focus on the democratic governance of the Internet, which is a key paradigm determining so much social change today, and for this purpose to begin looking in earnest at developing the necessary globally democratic institutional forums within the UN for making necessary Internet-related public policies.

Thank you .

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