My warmest greetings to everyone here today. I represent IT for change. As the UN Secretary General observed in Jan 2023, although 63% of the globe made some use of the Internet in 2021, opportunities in digital development remain beyond the reach of the people in greatest need.

To be digitally included is a basic right, today, as all activity — government, business, social, and individual — invariably has digital dimensions. Digital inclusion not only refers to access to affordable devices and universal connectivity, but also the individual and social capability to participate in and negotiate the digital paradigm for expanding life choices.

Digital inclusion cannot be meaningful if it amounts to coercive, exploitative or manipulative incorporation into digital space or erosion of its democratic integrity.

To be included, then, is to be included as a rights-bearing citizen and netizen. One who is able to enjoy a range of digital rights, to have guarantees against state and corporate excesses , and to directly benefit from platform, data, and AI technologies for wellbeing.

Meaningful and empowering digital inclusion for all requires us to privilege the lived experiences of the most marginalized communities. At the global level, the following key actions are required:

1. A shift in the framing: from bridging the access divide to building digital and social infrastructural capabilities, the lack of which perpetuates the development divide.

2. Dedicated public finance funding for a new global work program to equip low and middle income countries (LMICs) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) with public digital infrastructure. Unless we can ensure that 50% value from the digital economy accrues to the bottom 50% by 2030, most countries will be left behind. We commend the UN SG's proposal for the Digital Development Tax as a useful starting point in this regard, with a small modification — that it be used to support public platform, data, and AI infrastructure development in addition to connectivity.

3. Global policy shifts and investments for gender-inclusive, livelihoods-oriented, and ecologically respectful platform and data enterprise models.

4. A rule-of-law based digital inclusion approach in which privacy, autonomy, equity, and dignity are central, and digital services — market or state-led — that erode digital human rights are outlawed.