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It is a great honour to address this parliament of the world.

Madam President, Excellencies, Delegates and Colleagues:

The Internet is fundamentally transforming our world. These changes will be no less far-reaching than those of the industrial revolution.

The question then is: is the world today politically more mature, than it was in that distant past, to be able to better guide this transformation towards our common goals? More specifically; can the ideals of equity, social justice, human rights, democracy and sustainability, this time around, be a part of the very design of the emerging social structures?

Unfortunately, the early indications in this regard are not too good. The post millennial period during which the Internet has begun to underpin most social systems is also the time of one of the fastest ever increases in inequality across the world. This, when the Internet is supposed to be a socially egalitarian technology!

The Internet has been called the new nervous system of our society. Data is variously referred to as the new oil or the new currency. Just today, I read a World Economic Forum report which said that “Data could become a new ideology!”. Monopoly Internet platforms today mediate crucial social activities, driven by algorithms about which no one knows what and whose interests they serve. Such vital elements of society cannot remain ungoverned, left to unregulated market forces, and to the powerful.

But the past decade after the World Summit on the Information Society has regrettably failed to provide an adequate governance response to the many critical social, economic, political and cultural issues associated with the Internet.

As we move into the next decade from here, Madam President, permit me to appeal to this august gathering to urgently address the imperative of global governance of the Internet.

We can begin with three things.

First of all, we must give up the idea of Internet exceptionalism, of seeing the Internet as somehow so uniquely trans-national, bottom-up, and private sector -led that it cannot, and perhaps, need not, be governed. The Internet is no more trans-national than climate change; no more bottom-up than education, health and livelihood practices; and no more private sector -led than trade and intellectual property. All of these areas have dedicated global governance mechanisms in the UN system. And so should the Internet!

Next; the fully justified fear of possible statist abuse of the Internet has to be addressed by putting robust checks and balances into its governance mechanisms, and not by being in denial about the Internet's myriad and complex governance needs.

And thirdly, Madam President, a so-called tension between multilateralism and multistakeholderism must be resolved - through the test of democracy. The Internet should indeed be served by evolutionary forms of participatory governance. But the basics of democracy do not change: People, directly or through their representatives, alone can make public policy and law. Neither business nor technical experts can claim special, exalted roles in public policy decisions. Such a trend, as parts of civil society have noted with concern, is an unfortunate anti-democratic development in Internet governance today.

In conclusion: The world urgently needs a well-defined *democratic* mechanism for global governance of the Internet, which fully embraces the technical, social and political opportunities of a new, networked world. Such a mechanism is required *inter alia* as an anchor point, and a meta- support agency, for the governance of larger information society changes that are taking place across all sectors.

My esteemed colleagues, left to itself the digital-network phenomenon will certainly be appropriated by the powerful and will result in an even more unequal and unfair world, as early trends show.

Our digital future depends on what the United Nations does, or does not do, *now*.

Thank you.