



Excellencies,

We could not have imagined, in initiating our informal consultations on a Global Digital Compact (GDC) at the start of this year, how the rapid technological developments would capture the public imagination over the course of 2023. The rapid progress in the field of Artificial intelligence (AI) has further demonstrated the role digital technologies can play in shaping the ways we learn, communicate, work, and live across the world. The intergovernmental and multistakeholder consultations we, as co-facilitators, conducted have reinforced the urgency of joining our efforts to establish a framework for global digital cooperation promoting development and equality by agreeing on principles, objectives and actions to collectively harness the benefits and manage the risks of digitalization for all. This is a once in a generation opportunity.

We are in a unique position to build on the momentum from an unprecedented level of informal consultations, where, besides the Member States, we engaged with thousands of representatives from UN institutions, technical communities, academia, the private sector, and the full range of civil society, not least important voices from the youth. A genuinely global conversation is underway.

It is against this background that we would like to share our assessment from the deep dives that we conducted during the spring of 2023 as well as the broader consultations that took place. Based on what we heard at these deep dives as well as the broader consultations, we have identified wide support from diverse perspectives for the establishment of a GDC that rests on the principles of the UN Charter, Agenda 2030, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On that basis, our joint efforts should aim to strengthen **digital cooperation, close the digital divide and ensure an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital future for all**, which is anchored in human rights and that enables the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

There is broad support for the view that digital technologies, if properly harnessed, can **accelerate progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals**. Digital development has the potential to enhance sustainable economic development, foster social inclusion and address pressing challenges. In this regard, the importance of connectivity and digital public infrastructure was highlighted by many, especially within the fields of health and education. A GDC could support exchange and best practices among countries on digitalization in this regard.

**Universal, affordable and accessible connectivity** was highlighted as a key issue. An inclusive Global Digital Compact could help mobilize efforts to connect the remaining 2.7 billion people without Internet access. **Digital literacy and skills** were raised as fundamental to achieve meaningful universal connectivity. There is emerging convergence on the need to build digital capacities including through engaging public-private partnerships and promoting greater financial investment in affordable, accessible mobile connectivity.

Another key issue stressed is the importance of **an open, free and globally accessible Internet**. The significance of interoperable Internet standards and protocols has also been emphasized in this regard. Avoiding Internet fragmentation was highlighted by many. Reference to the importance of the Tunis Agenda was made and strong support was expressed for sustaining and strengthening a multistakeholder approach to governance of the Internet. There is broad consensus that the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) plays – and should continue to play – a key role in promoting the global and interoperable nature and governance of the Internet.

The important roles played by IGF, ITU, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCO, WSIS and other UN entities, structures, and forums have been emphasized and that a **GDC should not duplicate existing forums and processes**. At the same time, there is an expressed need to identify and address gaps to make the UN system and international cooperation more efficient and coordinated in responding to new and emerging challenges posed by rapid technological developments. To keep pace with technological development, a need for regular review and follow-up mechanisms was acknowledged.

The need for a GDC to articulate principles to guide regional and national approaches to **data protection and governance** was another issue emphasized. This includes the principle that people should have control over how their data is collected, processed, and stored. The need of leveraging data and cross-border data flows for economic growth and progress on the SDGs was emphasized while finding a balanced approach between free flow of data and data protection. Many have indicated that data should be treated as a cross-cutting enabler of an open, secure, and fair digital future.

There is convergence around the potential for a GDC to promote **digital trust and security** and to address disinformation, hate speech and other harmful online content. A GDC could advance transparent and responsible design and application, including a human rights-based approach, of digital technologies by technology developers and digital platforms. In this regard the Code of Conduct for Information Integrity on Digital Platforms that is being developed will be important.

**Artificial intelligence** is emerging as another key issue for a GDC. The benefits of AI and other emerging technologies in enhancing productivity, value creation and the wider digital economy, including accelerating the SDGs was acknowledged, while there is a need to further a common understanding of the risks entailed. Forms of regulation, standards and guardrails were mentioned as potential means to address some risks. There was emphasis on the need for a human centric approach as well as transparent and equitable risk-based approaches to the development, use and governance of AI.

The importance of addressing **digital gender divides**, including how women and girls could enjoy equal opportunities and rights while addressing risks, was highlighted as a cross-cutting issue.

Another emerging issue is the need for **sustainability** to be addressed in a GDC. The role of green technology and digitalization to accelerating climate ambitions was highlighted, alongside the need of addressing technology-related drivers of climate risk such as growing energy consumption and e-waste.

We are grateful for the widespread engagement, knowledge and support of Member States, regional organizations, UN entities, private sector, technical community and civil society from around the world. The deep dives have provided the foundation for further deliberations on a GDC at the 78th session of the General Assembly. We thank Member States for their engagement in our collective effort to establish a framework for global digital cooperation.

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Please accept, Your excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.



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