



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, DURING THE DEBATE ON AGENDA ITEM 17: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT, AT THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 28 October 2015)

Mr Chairman,

I am pleased to deliver the following remarks on this agenda item on behalf of the members of the Group of 77 and China.

As developing countries, members of this Group have always appreciated the crucial and enabling role that information and communication technologies play both as a tool for and a measure of development. Information and communication technologies have over the years had a tremendous impact on their economies, education, healthcare, culture and politics and will increasingly do so as more developing countries expand their ICT capabilities.

In this regard, the Group appreciates the informative Secretary-General's report (A/70/63-E/2015/10) on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society and the areas it highlights both with regards to the progress that has been made thus far and the challenges that still have to be tackled to effect more access and enjoyment of information and communication technologies by all.

The report points to encouraging growth in the adoption and use of information and communications technologies in both developed and developing countries. Another positive indication is that over 90 percent of the world's population is now covered by mobile networks and that the number of mobile subscriptions is almost equal to the world's population. It is also encouraging that the WSIS target that half the world's population should have access to ICTs within their reach and make use of them is likely to be achieved by the end of 2016.

Mr Chairman,

While this is laudable, we continue to be equally concerned with the prevailing digital divides between and within our countries. As can be gleaned from the report, there is unequal access to the Internet, while fixed and mobile broadband connections are much more widely available, and more affordable, in developed than developing countries. Within most of our countries, rural areas still have little broadband access. This poses a risk of failure to harness the potential of ICTs as a useful tool and enabler for development.

Further concern is also raised by the seeming new divides that have been growing in access to broadband networks and the services that they enable. It is further disconcerting that least developed countries may fall behind developed and other developing countries in broadband access and use, and that rural areas are often disadvantaged in comparison with urban areas. The often identified gender gap in ICT access and use is a phenomenon that we can also ill-afford to ignore.

At the global level, it is equally important for all countries, in particular the developing countries, to

participate as equal partners in the discussions and decisions on ICTs for development.

Mr Chairman,

When we look at information and communication technologies within the context of the recently adopted 2030 Agenda, the urgency to harness ICTs' potential as critical enablers of sustainable development becomes even more heightened. The potential impact of ICTs on the implementation of the development agenda is such that all countries should be ready to exploit its developmental value.

Towards this end, both the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognised ICTs as essential development enablers.

This makes the need to invest in capacity-building and education essential to enable those less capable among us to productively use ICTs in elaborating the agenda and derive social and economic gains from technological innovation.

In conclusion,

The contribution of ICTs to development in areas such as health, education, agricultural development, early warning system, responses to the impacts of climate change and disaster risk reduction, and humanitarian response has been considerable and continues to grow. We need to make considerable efforts towards building the capacity of developing countries if we are to leverage the full potential of ICTs and harness them in the implementation of sustainable development.

Thank you.