



**Statement by the Republic of Maldives
On behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) at
The United Nations High Level Meeting on the overall review of the implementation of the
outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
15-16 December 2015**

Distinguished Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is my great pleasure to speak here today, and I want to extend my sincere congratulations to the tremendous work that has been done by the Co-facilitators, and their very able team.
2. A decade ago we gathered in this forum to discuss the impacts of ICTs and their role in the development of societies. Little did we know that we were at a turning point in the way mankind was transitioning into a fundamentally different era of the Information Age.
3. This year has been a hugely impactful one here at the UN. With the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the successful conclusion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and more recently the Paris Agreement of the Conference of Parties to UNFCCC as our achievements, a good outcome for the ten-year review of the WSIS process will be another milestone achieved.
4. One thing in common across these processes and outcomes is the recognition of the enormous potential that ICTs have in realizing sustainable development for all. And the that the ambitious targets that we have set for ourselves in the these processes will find deep interlinkages with our goals for ICTs and the implementation of one will find resonance in the success of the other.
5. The Maldives today, is pleased to speak as the Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) on behalf of the 44 small island developing states who are our members and observers. We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the South African Minister of Telecommunications and Postal Services on behalf of the Group of 7 and China.

Mr President,

6. The world as we know it has changed drastically since we met to discuss the growing significance of ICTs in Geneva and Tunis. The SIDS, like all other countries, big or small, vulnerable or with robust economies, have seen the revolutionary momentum that knowledge societies have brought forth. We have also understood the opportunities that ICTs present. For SIDS, ICT services are the key enablers of economic and social development, and greatly enhance operational efficiencies in service deliveries..
7. This is why in the SAMOA Pathway, our “blueprint” for sustainable development priorities, identified clearly the need for enhanced access and use of information and communications technology infrastructure networks as necessary for sustaining high levels of economic growth. This is why the SAMOA Pathway identified investing in technology and related capacity building in ICT as a key means of implementation. This is why our national development strategies have for years taken these into consideration, be it in investing in technology for advancements in health, education, disaster risk reduction, people centered development, or combatting climate change.
8. Small Island developing States face unique challenges, which identify them as a special case for sustainable development. Our geographical isolation, dispersion over large expanses of area, and vulnerability for environmental risk and natural disasters signal great potential for ICTs as a tool to enhance development effort. At the same time, our small size, remoteness from markets and subsequent inability to achieve markets of scale, and limited technical and human capacity, pose significant risks to the development and use of ICTs. And it is these challenges that we must address specifically for the potential benefits of the Information Society to be released in SIDS.
9. One of the founding principles of WSIS is that of addressing the digital divide. Lack of access to affordable and reliable technologies continues to remain the key challenge to ICT deployment in SIDS. Efforts need to be made for capacity building to enable access.
10. Lack of access is coupled by non-interpretability of data received. The digital divide continues to widen because access to information, in and of itself, does

not result into knowledge. The digital divide can only be bridged when content and technology is geared towards local needs and priorities while enhancing capabilities of end users to make productive use of data.

Mr President,

11. We are happy to note the outcome document takes into account the role of ICTs in disaster and humanitarian assistance. As we have time and again witnessed, information and communication systems can greatly reduce the economic and social impacts from natural hazards. We have recently also observed increasing number of countries utilizing the power of ICTs in disaster risk management in their national contexts. This is being done through advancements in remote sensing, geographic information systems, seismic surveillance systems, improved tsunami monitoring networks and even using ICTs to streamline emergency warning capabilities.
12. For SIDS, some of the most vulnerable countries to all sorts of natural hazards, disasters and climate change, it is imperative that there is adequate knowledge sharing and technology transfer - which would go a long way in ensuring that small island states like ours could also benefit from these technological advancements. Therefore, while we welcome the call for greater investments in this field, we also take this opportunity to call for greater cooperation between developed and developing countries so that there is adequate capacity building and technology transfer to increase resilience in our societies.
13. It is imperative that the management and development of ICTs including that of the Internet and broadband services are framed within the context of a multi stakeholder, multilateral, inclusive and transparent process – and perhaps most importantly, one that is directed towards development and one which remains un-politicized. In this regard, it is important to recognize the importance of enhanced participation in decision-making and agenda setting of these processes so that every voice, small or large, is heard loud and clear.

Mr President

14. As we close a great year for multilateralism, let us now turn towards the more important task at hand: implementation. We have in our hands, the ability to

truly transform our world. And let us not waste this opportunity. Let future generations define us - not by our inaction - but by our action.

I thank you.