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**Statement by
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AT THE BRIEFING FOR MEMBER STATES ON MATTERS RELATED TO THE
CONTINUATION OF THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to attend this briefing on matters related to the continuation of the Internet Governance Forum.

As you may know, at the 65th session of the General Assembly Member States will have before them a note of the Secretary-General conveying his recommendations on the desirability of continuation of what is known as the Internet Governance Forum. I want to inform you about the process for preparation of the SG's recommendations and the consideration of those recommendations by the UN Membership. I would also like to take this opportunity to answer any questions you may have about the process and why the issue calls for your attention. I hope you find it informative.

Importance of the Internet

First, a bit of background is in order. Since the time this powerful tool of development was first introduced, the Internet has undergone profound changes. The number of Internet users is now close to 2 billion, and it is estimated that another 1 billion will be online by 2015 – half of the world's population. Indeed, in some countries, particularly in developed regions, the Internet is already deeply woven into the economic and social fabric of the nation.

Though the digital divide is wide – with Africa and Arab States lagging behind Europe, Asia and the Americas – gains are being made. In 2005, more than 50 per cent of people in developed regions were using the Internet, compared to 9 per cent in developing regions and only 1 per cent in least developed countries. By 2009, the number of people connecting in developing countries had expanded by an impressive 475 million to 17.5 per cent, and in LDCs by 4 million to 1.5 per cent, while Internet penetration in developed regions increased to 64 per cent.

Role of the IGF

The World Summit on the Information Society recognized that the Internet needed new ways of addressing governance issues. Heads of State and Government, gathering in Tunis in 2005, carefully considered the action required to bridge the digital divide and promote

cooperation based on the vision of a “people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life”.

Recognizing that the legitimacy of Internet governance would be based on the full participation of all stakeholders, from both developed and developing countries, within their respective roles and responsibilities, Member States decided to ask the Secretary-General to convene a new multi-stakeholder platform to discuss public policy issues related to Internet governance, in what we now know as the Internet Governance Forum.

The Secretariat of the Forum is housed in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDESA. As you may recall, in addition to UNCTAD, UNDESA has overall responsibility for promoting cooperation among all stakeholders in Internet-related public policy issues, and is one of the major UN system players in WSIS follow-up – along with ITU, UNESCO and UNDP. In particular, UNDESA has been assigned responsibility for supporting implementation of WSIS Action Lines C1 (on the role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development), C7 (on e-government) and C11 (on international and regional cooperation). Among others, the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society in 2005 generated two outcomes, one was the Internet Governance Forum, and the other was the Global Alliance for ICT and Development.

The Internet Governance Forum has organized itself an annual conference of stakeholders held on a different continent each year in order to facilitate broad-based participation. The first meeting was held in Athens in 2006, the second in Rio de Janeiro in 2007, the third in Hyderabad in 2008 and the fourth in Sharm El Sheikh in 2009. The Government of Lithuania will host the fifth annual meeting of the Forum in Vilnius, Lithuania from 14-17 September 2010. Participation is open to all United Nations Member States, and any organization or person with proven expertise and experience in matters related to Internet governance.

The programme of the annual IGF meeting is prepared by a Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) established by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2006 for this purpose. The Group has 56 members nominated by different stakeholder groups taking into consideration geographical and gender balance. It has been the practice of the Group to meet three times per year. The MAG is chaired by the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser for Internet Governance.

Given the diversity of interests, the programme of the IGF has been wide-ranging. Some of the issues taken up include:

- Management of critical Internet resources;
- Security, openness and privacy;
- Internet access and diversity;
- Cyber-security;
- Multilingualism; and
- The impact of social networks.

According to the Tunis Agenda, IGF is not to replace existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations. It is intended to constitute a neutral, non-duplicative and non-

binding process, and have no involvement in day-to-day or technical operations of the Internet. It is a place where Governments, civil society, the private sector and international organizations discuss both the technical underpinnings of the Internet and important questions of economic and social development. They share their insights and achievements. Above all, they build a common understanding of the Internet's great potential as well as the many risks and challenges in its governance.

Even though the Forum has no decision-making authority, it offers an inclusive environment for discussing problems of common interest drawing on expert knowledge of the Internet. Some observers have suggested that it thus contributes indirectly to finding solutions and to shaping decisions taken elsewhere.

How the review process will unfold

When the IGF was created, it was given a lifespan of five years, after which time Member States would review the desirability of its continuation. The Secretary-General was asked to assist in this process by examining its merits taking into account the views of its many participants. More precisely, Member States, in paragraph 76 of the Tunis Agenda "ask the UN Secretary-General to examine the desirability of the continuation of the Forum, in formal consultation with Forum participants, within five years of its creation, and to make recommendations to the UN Membership in this regard." Those five years are now coming to an end.

The formal consultations were initiated by an online process, starting with a questionnaire prepared by the IGF Secretariat. In addition, a *note verbale* was addressed to all diplomatic missions accredited to the United Nations Office at Geneva, soliciting input from all UN Member States.

A total of 61 written submissions were received following these calls for public comment, of which 40 responded to the online questionnaire. Contributions were received from Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and organizations representing civil society and the private sector, including representatives of the academic and technical communities. Comments were also received from a number of individuals.

In November 2009, I convened a formal consultation with IGF participants during the fourth meeting of the Forum in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. During the consultation, 47 speakers from the different stakeholder groups delivered a short statement on this subject. Eight statements of participants who were not given a speaking slot due to time constraints were posted online. In addition, two statements were submitted after the consultations.

The total number of contributions over the six-month consultation period from July to December 2009 was thus 118.

Paragraph 35 of the Tunis Agenda enumerates four groups of stakeholders and describes, in broad terms, the role that each might play in Internet governance. They are:

1. Governments;
2. The private sector;
3. Civil society;
4. Intergovernmental and other international organizations.

Member States also recognized “the valuable contribution by the academic and technical communities within those stakeholder groups mentioned in paragraph 35 to the evolution, functioning and development of the Internet.”

Here, Member States have been very clear. The WSIS Declaration of Principles adopted during the first phase of the Summit express a commitment to building an inclusive, people-centred and developed-oriented Information Society for all. The Tunis Agenda, adopted during the second phase, reinforced this understanding by calling for the establishment of a platform for multistakeholder dialogue, the IGF, where all voices could be heard.

What stakeholders have said

There are a number of issues that Forum participants and others have brought to the attention of the Secretary-General. At Sharm El Sheikh, there was support for continuing the IGF as it is, and support for continuing the IGF subject to a number of conditions.

Most of the speakers who supported improvements wanted the IGF to refocus its attention on points such as the following:

- International public policy issues;
- Capacity-building;
- Participation by developing countries;
- Improved transparency;
- Improved communications; and
- More visibility for outcomes, and possibly the ability to make recommendations.

Submission of the Recommendations of the Secretary-General

It is in the spirit of inclusiveness that the recommendations of the Secretary-General must be prepared, taking into account the opinions expressed by all stakeholder groups in the consultations.

Based on paragraph 76 of the Tunis Agenda, the note will be transmitted to the 65th session of the General Assembly for consideration under item 17 of the provisional agenda on information and communication technology for development.

The General Assembly will decide on the issue of the continuation of the IGF.

Recently, some Member States have expressed the desire that the note of the Secretary-General on continuation of the IGF be submitted to CSTD for consideration.

As you know, the agenda and the programme of work of CSTD were decided by ECOSOC in its decision 2009/219. The decision did not request that the Commission review the continuation of the IGF. Nor was there any subsequent request for the submission of the recommendations of the Secretary-General to CSTD.

In the provisional annotated agenda and organization of work issued early this month under the symbol E/CN.16/2010/1, the matter of the continuation of the IGF was nowhere mentioned in the annotated agenda of CSTD.

While CSTD is scheduled to consider WSIS follow up, it will address the broad issue of the assessment of the five-year progress made in the implementation of WSIS.

Without a specific request from CSTD, as reflected in the decision of ECOSOC, DESA is proceeding with the preparation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General, with the documentation timeline for the General Assembly.

The matter whether the CSTD will consider the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the continuation of the IGF will therefore be a decision by Member States.

Regarding the note of the Secretary-General containing the recommendations on the continuation of the IGF, UNDESA could circulate the note of the Secretary-General during the 13th session of CSTD in Geneva from 17-21 May.

However, since the Secretariat is preparing the note according to the documentation timeline of the General Assembly, the note will be only in the unedited form in English only. The official document in six languages will not be available before then. As you know, the advance text itself must go through editing, translation and production processes.

So the issue before us is two-fold – a decision by Member States as to whether the recommendations of the Secretary-General should be submitted first to CSTD; and whether Member States could proceed with consideration of the recommendations in the advance unedited form and not in six official languages.

At any rate I would be pleased to send a representative to CSTD to share whatever information we can on the substance of the Secretary-General's recommendations, if invited.

Let me conclude by repeating that this briefing serves to inform you about the process for preparation of the Secretary-General's recommendation and consideration of those recommendations by the UN Membership. I hope that I have clarified enough to increase the awareness and to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation on the subject.

Thank you. Now I am happy to answer any questions you may have.
