Secretary-General Toure, Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, delegates, good morning.

I am here today on behalf of the Internet & Digital Ecosystem Alliance, a Swiss Association that brings for-profit and not-for-profit Internet sector stakeholders together to advocate for a human-rights and permissionless-innovation centric Internet and a policy environment for decision-making that ensures all those with a stake in the Internet’s future have a seat at the table.

Others have spoken of the accomplishments we as a community have achieved in the last 10 years - work that must not, and has not, gone unnoticed, unappreciated, or unrecognised. However, we also need to have a clear-eyed view of where we need to improve moving forward.

We know a major objective of WSIS is to narrow the digital divide in Internet access and access to information online yet according to the latest statistics the digital divide is growing, not shrinking, for 25% of the world’s population in 39 countries.

Sadly, it is also true that countries increasingly choose policies contrary to the spirit of WSIS: reducing freedom of speech online, mandating the local hosting of data, services, hardware, or all of the above, and increasingly significant forms of data-protectionism.

Last, but not least, in international policy meetings, political disputes related to how societies’ values can conflict with respect to content online obscures, frustrates, and often prevents more constructive discussions about frictions that result from a simple fact: we are simultaneously citizens of a borderless online society and of countries and societies with borders offline.

Let’s look forward: What do we need to do differently going forward?

How many attending this conference are from the non-governmental ICT sector? Look around you. A tiny proportion. This is a symptom of a serious problem: the ICT sector writ large is overwhelmingly responsible for building the networks, hardware, software, and services and the underlying addressing systems and standards that knit it together. I speak to many companies worldwide and not one has told me that even one decision about investment or products has been impacted by consideration of WSIS’ objectives. Not one. In fact, most tell me they see WSIS as dominated by political disputes about content online, control of the Internet’s technical architecture, and who gets to participate in decision-making and how.

IDEA believes we need to ensure follow-up on the WSIS action lines is far more aligned to using ICTs to deliver on the Millennium Development Goals.. Aside from the practical sense this makes it creates the space for tech to participate in solving problems as that is, for them, a discussion about creating and serving markets. That’s a conversation the private sector will show up for. It also creates the space for innovative non-profits to participate more, helping people new to technology learn to use it to create the local content, products and services we all want to see. How can WSIS truly succeed if it fails to deeply engage the very sector whose products and services are driving this incredible transformation?

Finally and perhaps most relevant to those of us in Geneva and New York: we need to to do a far better job of protecting WSIS follow-up from disputes that have little or nothing to do with development. WSIS was supposed to be 90% about development and 10% about governance yet it often seems the reverse is true. We need to recognise that technology can reflect, but not solve, social issues - and stop trying to ask it to.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that my comments are seen as they are intended: we have done much, but we have to learn from the past so we can do more, faster, and for billions more of us.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.