



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2019

ITU Secretary General's Statement to the General Debate of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment and HLPF Ministerial Segment UNHQ, New York

From artificial intelligence to the Internet of Things to 5G, the world of technology is changing fast. And nations around the globe are changing with it, joining the digital revolution to tackle some of our planet's biggest challenges.

As the UN specialized agency for ICTs, ITU is at the forefront of this revolution. With 193 governments as well as some 900 private sector companies, universities and other international and regional organizations, ITU's membership reflects today's digital economy.

ITU applauds and supports the efforts of countries to leverage technology to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. We are encouraged to see that with each passing year, VNRs feature ICTs more prominently.

This year's VNRs show what governments can do when they engage on a range of issues as complex and critical as health care, education, energy, the environment, governance, agriculture, climate change and early warning systems – but also blockchain, AI, fintech, smart and sustainable cities, IoT, and big data.

These new technologies hold great potential for human progress. They also raise complex questions about trust and privacy and pose a number of challenges, including the future of work, child online protection, digital sexual violence, and e-waste.

One of ITU's priorities is to ensure trusted, safe and inclusive development of these technologies and equitable access to their benefits when, for the first time in history, more than half of the world's population uses the Internet.

As this year's VNRs make clear, now is the time to invest in key areas such as ICT and digital infrastructure, digital literacy, affordability, digital safety, and cybersecurity.

And because inequality anywhere is a threat to equality everywhere, ITU commends the countries who used ICTs this year to promote women's empowerment, youth, people with disabilities, digital financial inclusion, SMEs and entrepreneurship, and connecting the rural communities.

The only way we can achieve the SDGs by 2030 is through multi-stakeholder partnerships, a core component of ITU's membership and activities – from our study and focus groups to our events, such as the AI for Good Global Summit and the WSIS Forum.

Let us move forward together in our efforts to align the WSIS process with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ITU calls on all stakeholders to join forces to use the power of tech to turn today's digital revolution into a development revolution.