2008 Global Event on Measuring the Information Society

Geneva, 27-29 May 2008

Chairpersons' Summary and Concluding Remarks

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

During the past two and a half days, we had a very rich and fruitful debate. We heard many interesting presentations and contributions from different regions in the world and from countries present at this event.

In his inauguration, Dr. Hamadoun Touré noted that the desire of countries to increase the availability of ICTs to support development has highlighted the growing need for reliable, comprehensive and comparable statistical information. This is important on a national level, to help governments identify their progress, their strengths and their weaknesses, in order to tackle and finally overcome barriers to wider and better access to ICTs. I believe there is wide agreement on the recognition that ICT statistics help policy makers to review progress and to better plan for future work on information society development.

The meeting acknowledged that ICT measurement can serve internationally agreed development goals, such as the MDGs. Information society measurements are also essential to the monitoring of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, and an integral part of its follow-up. There is a need to increase the availability of the core ICT indicators, but it was also proposed that ICT measurement be taken a step further, in particular by improving the statistical, analytical and policy frameworks, and focusing on the social and economic impact of ICTs.

The importance, success and achievement of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development were highlighted. The Partnership has not only managed to showcase the international cooperation, but also rightly called upon countries to cooperate at the national level.

The Partnership publication "The Global Information Society: A statistical view", which was launched during the meeting, assesses progress in measuring the information society by showing available ICT indicators and exploring remaining data gaps. There has been an

increase in the collection of ICT data by developing countries, although data availability in the developing world remains limited. The regional initiatives of the regional commissions for information society measurement have been instrumental in advancing the availability of ICT statistics and indicators. More developing nations need to incorporate ICT statistics into their regular statistical surveys, since this information is vital for making effective decisions on linking national economies into global information networks and for taking advantage of the opportunities such technologies as the Internet offer for development.

The meeting considered the revision of the core list of indicators. Revisions of the existing core indicators focused on infrastructure, household and business indicators. The revisions included the refining of definitions and rewording of the indicators. Changes are meant to improve the accuracy of the indicators and to avoid duplications.

The Partnership presented a core set of indicators on ICT in education, which has resulted from a consultation process with stakeholders during the past year. Given the new dynamics in the education sector in the information age and its importance in achieving the MDGs, there is a growing need to monitor trends in the paradigm shift in teaching-learning as well as the versatile skills demand on the labour market. Therefore, seven new basic core indicators as well as two extended core indicators were recommended for inclusion in the Partnership's core list. It was agreed that proposed definitions need to be refined after pilot-testing with the possibility of expanding the list in the future with measures of ICT's intensity of use in education, progress in ICT skills and impact on educational achievements.

As I mentioned at the end of the first day of this event, the process for finalizing the revisions to the existing indicators and the new indicators on education will be as follows:

Within two weeks time, a document that will include all proposed revisions to the existing core list will be disseminated by the Partnership via the Internet and sent to the participants of this meeting. Countries that wish to provide further comments on those revisions are invited to do so until the end of July 2008. Then the Partnership will finalize the document, and the revised core list will be presented to the UN Statistical Commission in 2009.

Ladies and gentlemen,

An important part of the meeting considered the measurement of the impact of ICT. There is no doubt that ICTs are transforming our economies and societies in an unprecedented way. The measurement of the impact of ICT on different industries, different countries and

regions, and its effects on different groups of people presents challenges as to what and how to measure. Despite these difficulties, the outcomes of recent research have demonstrated that there are sufficient choices for estimating a minimum set of ICT impact indicators. The participants at the meeting expressed strong interest on the impact of ICT in socio-economic development. It is worth highlighting a few of the main conclusions:

- Given that ICTs are general purpose technologies, their impact depends on a range of complementary investments (for example, investments in intangibles, innovation, skills, new business models) and on how the technologies are used.

- Micro-data is a valuable resource for analysing the differences in impact as a result of a "digital divide" or differences in the way ICTs are used. Therefore, a minimum set of basic ICT use indicators are necessary.

- Stakeholder-based approaches could be applied in measuring e-government impacts for users of services.

- The Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development has already shown the value of coordinated approaches to measurement. There could also be value in coordinated approaches to impact analysis.

- The contribution of the Partnership to international debates is critical. In this context, the Partnership is encouraged to try to identify ways to measure the WSIS targets.

Another important area of measurement concerns the services provided by government organizations and work is in progress to develop indicators on measuring e-government. UNECA has discussed the subject at the regional level and as a result has developed proposals for a number of indicators on the use of ICT by government organizations. The Partnership Task Group on eGovernment will further examine the proposal and continue work on developing comparable methods on the measuring eGovernment.

Online, web-based tools to measure impact and user satisfaction of eGovernment services are proposed to be developed in Europe in order to improve and better target eGovernment services.

Perhaps most feasible is the measurement of eGovernment from the demand side, through household and business surveys. The example of Brazil provided an interesting case study of how ICT is changing the way public services are used.

The meeting highlighted the importance of gender-disaggregated ICT data and demonstrated how much we don't know about the gender gap and how to address it. The gender gap is wide in both developing and developed countries, whether or not there is high or low Internet penetration. There are different reasons for the gender gap, and the suggestion to collect more data on many countries can show differences that can help us analyze and understand the gender gap. As a result, it was suggested that several core ICT indicators, such as cellular subscribers, various business measures, as well as access to ICTs in education should be collected for both men and women.

We have also heard about the important issue of measuring security and trust in an online environment. OECD and Eurostat model surveys include questions designed to measure barriers to households and businesses doing business on the Internet, including those related to security. Some findings of the surveys show that privacy and security concerns are not barriers for households to doing business on the Internet; that more businesses are using firewalls over time; and that central governments are better equipped to deal with Internet security issues. One challenge is for businesses to convince consumers that e-commerce is safe, and collecting official indicators is a challenge, especially for e-government and security.

The meeting also presented the work under way to create a global ICT database using the UN Data platform. Partnership members will be discussing the plan to move forward, and to explore the possibility of using the SDMX (Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange) standards to reduce the reporting burden. The Partnership's Task Group on Database Development proposes to develop a Global ICT Database to include the core ICT indicators in the UN Data Portal. It is also proposed that the TGDD develop Statistical Data and Metadata (SDMX) standards for core ICT indicators.

A major challenge to information society measurements, including impact measurement, remains the data gap globally. Therefore, it is essential to examine a number of different strategies to enhance the availability of ICT statistics, at the national, regional and international levels. This is what today's morning session considered. An essential part is

how to assist developing countries that lack resources and capacities to develop their ICT statistical programmes. The Partnership and its member agencies has been working during the past few years to support countries through a variety of different projects, workshops and training courses. This work should be continued and further expanded, and the international donor community should provide the necessary support to this work.

Other strategies include the raising of awareness among the policy makers, and the upcoming OECD Ministerial in Korea will provide an excellent forum for this. Also, this afternoon, the Partnership will present a progress report to the participants attending the 11th session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, under the agenda item of the WSIS follow-up.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It has been a great pleasure for me to chair this meeting. Lebanon, as one of the elected members of the United Nations Statistical Commission, will support all the recommendations related to ICT Statistics and make a short report of this meeting during the next session of the UN Statistical Commission meeting in 2009 in New York.