

High-Level Policy Statements

Policy Statements F

Mr Nick Ashton-Hart, Executive Director, Internet and Digital Ecosystem Alliance

Secretary-General Toure, Madame Chair, Excellencies, delegates, good morning.

I am here today on behalf of the Internet & Digital Ecosystem Alliance, a Swiss Association that combines for-profit and not-for-profit tech sector stakeholders to advocate for a human-rights and permissionless-innovation centric Internet.

So many things good and true - and some that are difficult to hear - have been said by those that have spoken before me. I shall try not to repeat any of them; if I succeed this may be the shortest speech you hear this week!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have yet to feed, clothe, shelter, educate, or ensure access to adequate sanitation and basic medical care for the whole human family.

We are not going to close the digital divide by accident.

We will have to do it on purpose.

In 2010, according to ITU statistics, an average of more than 771,000 people went online for the first time worldwide - each day. That was the peak. The number in 2014 is 580,000+. The trendline is, at best, wobbly, despite average annual investment in telecommunications over the same period, according to the World Bank, of US\$288 billion.

We must squarely face the reality that we have already connected the wealthiest and most commercially profitable users. From here on in, it will get more increasingly both difficult and expensive. We cannot afford to project out into the future using the numbers of the past, as if we will connect the last 50% up because we did the first 50. That would be as much a fantasy as assuming we will provide medical care for those who do not yet have it because some of us have it now.



This year is the year, Ladies and Gentlemen, when we can realise the promise of the historic accident of history WSIS was gifted: being born in the same year as the MDGs. The decennial review of each is happening this year. 10 years ago we didn't ensure that the WSIS goals and action lines were linked effectively to support meeting the MDGs.

2015 can be different.

2015 must be different.

We cannot allow the greatest communications tools invented in all history to remain even slightly disconnected from humanity's noblest cause: a joined-up global effort to ensure that the every member of our species is able to live a life of dignity and opportunity.

Madame Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, is there any more noble cause than realising that vision?

I think we all know that magnificent vision cannot be realised without universal access to ICTs.

Let's not try.

Thank you for listening.