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HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE: WSIS LEGACY IN  
MOTION: HONORING THE PAST, SHAPING THE FUTURE  
SESSION 133

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2025/Agenda/Session/133>

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>> HOST: Thank you. We will begin our high-level dialogue, WSIS legacy in motion, honouring the past and shaping the future. I would like to invite Ms. Anriette Esterhuysen from APC to please lead the session. She's going to be the Moderator and will lead you through the session. The floor is yours.

>> MODERATOR: I am privileged to be here as someone that was here in 2003 and 2005. We will have the opportunity to listen to people, countries and institutions from who were here during the WSIS process. I will welcome the panel on stage. First His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Digital Economy and Society Thailand, Minister Prasert Jantararungtong. Please take a seat. The one to my right here. Give a big round of applause.

Next is Ambassador Janis Karklins, Ambassador-at-Large on United Nations Global Agenda Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. Janis has a special role here at WSIS. You will hear more about that.

Next is Professor Kathleen Cramer, the current President and CEO of IEEE, the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

Then we have Pierre Bonis the chief Executive Officer of AFNIC, who manages FR the France country code top level domain.

And then we have Maria Fernanda Garza, Member of the IGF

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Leadership Panel. Special welcome. And she is the current Honorary Chair of the International Chamber of Commerce.

I think that is it. We have a full panel. Before I ask the first questions, I want to reflect on the fact that earlier when people were asked who were here during 2003 and who were here in 2005, we saw very few hands. The WSIS process has continued to evolve and be relevant. And a testimony of the fact that Groups like the WSIS Forum organizers and IGF have succeeded in bringing more people, younger people into the WSIS process. And grown the ecosystem and grown the people that are part of it.

But now we really do need to look ahead. What are the challenges that lie ahead? This panel will look at how we can draw on the lessons of the WSIS process.

What worked and did not work so well in taking that road forward.

So I'll ask the first question, and he can answer from his Chair. I will take a seat, as well. Your Excellency Minister Jantararuantong, from your perspective, looking back at the early days of WSIS, what lessons do you think we learned around global digital cooperation that can guide us at the moment in future digital development. And doing that in the context of the world that is very different. I think international cooperation is so much more challenging than it was in 2003. Yes?

>> PRASERT JANTARARUANGTONG: Good question. Thank you. I would like to thank the SG of ITU for inviting me to the WSIS+20 this year and to this high-level dialogue. One lesson is the power of working together. From the beginning, WSIS brought together Government high risk Sector --

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The tasks are also essential. In Thailand, we have the operation centre and AOC. It is the one-stop service centre that use AI and call centre collaboration to work together. So far, AOC have blocked thousands of scams and preventing significant financial losses. It is our commitment to putting safety at the heart of the digital development.

In Thailand, we now have high speed Internet in most village. But in the connectivity, we have the digital skill to rebuild the Digital Divide. In our community so that everyone including women, youth, elders and people in remote areas can benefit from the digital economy. In closing, we are proud to be part of the WSIS journey. Thailand will continue working with the ITU and our partners to shape a digital future that is open and safe for everyone. Thank you so much.

>> MODERATOR: Jan is. You facilitated the difficult phase of the WSIS, the second phase in Tunis, where some of the issues that were not resolved in 2003 were have to be dealt with and Internet Governance. You had to expel Civil Society from the room with they were unruly. Maybe that is a myth, but you are known for being someone that succeeded in the complex issues. Based on that experience, what

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lessons do you have and lessons you think you have learned and we all should have learned to guide us as we go into this post WSIS+20 process. Particularly as we try to integrate a new process, the Global Digital Compact?

>> JANIS KARKLINS: I did have to expel them because of the things happening. I told them not to sit on the Chairs, you will be seen. This is how Civil Society followed discussions at the time when multistakeholder participation was not fully accepted in the WSIS process.

But jokes aside, looking back to 2005 preparations, I think that one strategic discussion that was made to separate discussions on funding issues and the Internet Governance issues proved to be right, we have everything related to financial issues and the third was devoted to the Internet Governance.

But also looking backwards, we felt at that time it was very complex and difficult issues. Reality is with today's eyes, we certainly can say that actually it was very easy. We were dealing we were dealing with measurable issues and connectivity. A public policy to be put in place enabling environment creating that enabling environment. All of that was it was slightly charges but objective and measurable.

Cybersecurity was mentioned in general terms and spam was identified as the biggest threat to Internet.

If we would live in that world today, that would be nice.

Here I'm putting my Cybersecurity responsibility hat in the Ministry today. We didn't speak about the misuse or malicious use of the Internet. The mindset was very positive and we were talking exclusively about the opportunities the technology would create. Progress has been remarkable. Less than a billion Internet users at that time. 5.6 today. The quality has improved. It is the process to raise hands. How many in this room remember what dial-up Internet is? Not that many actually. Because today we talk about broadband Internet and broadband was not used as a term in 2005.

So I think also, looking backwards we can see that the multistakeholder cooperation has brought benefit to Governments and stakeholders. Finally, I put a little bit of negative spin to the reflection. Because at that time, we were talking and dreaming about a Global Information Society, putting emphasis on Global. Global digital village also was used at that time.

Increasingly today, we are hearing we need to go to digital serenity, which means putting borders on the Global idea and probably we need to reflect whether everything we have decided in implementing now has been leading us towards idea of Global Information Society so something is not right or we miss terms in order to preserve the dream in 2005. Thank you.

>> MODERATOR: I want to ask you a quick follow-up question on that Janis. Do you think we were naïve in having that dream and focus? Or do you think we have just become more preoccupied with risks and harms and less focused on possibilities and opportunities? Is that

perhaps why it is harder to cooperate? Or is it naivety.

>> JANIS KARKLINS: It is not naivety, it is our understanding of use of technology was seriously lagging behind technological evolution. That is one reason. Today is even more that with the development of new technology and quantum soon coming. We don't know what we will do, especially when using in our education system principles that have been developed in 19th century. We're applying our knowledge of analog society to this new digital society. There is a physical difference in both.

>> MODERATOR: Thanks, Janis. Kathleen, let's go to you and how do we shape the digital future for development? In a way that retains that focus on the WSIS vision of people-centred development and inclusive Information Society.

>> KATHLEEN KRAMER: I'm honoured to be here today, I'm here with IEEE. Looking back over the 20 years, I confess to not being here at that time. Certainly I was not -- I wish I could say I was starting my technical journey, but that is not even true. IEEE is a community of over 500,000 members from 190 countries. All of us, including many not here as part of my Delegation were dedicated to advancing technology for the benefit of humanity.

It is through our communities of dedicated and expert members that were working to develop Global standards and provide excellence in education to the future. We stand at a remarkable juncture preceded by technical advancement, AI, advanced robotics, the pace of innovation can be breath taking and seems potentially limitless, but to harness the potential of such advancements to address the challenges and ensure the technologies really serve humanity, the two critical pillars to answer your question a roundabout way are robust education with strength from and for STEM that are suspect to support that future innovation. And a strong standardization ecosystem supporting needed and timely development of standards.

To consider the qualities of education that is necessary to support this future of innovation and contributing as an Engineer or to the future of computing builds fundamentally upon the quality of your studies in science, technology, Engineering, math, not just being enthusiastic, not just being inspired. Not just being happy to be part of it. But to have really high quality education, these are the essential gateways to our fields to allow you to contribute to the future of technology, designing, building, maintaining complex systems.

But even the most brilliant of individuals, and our work in our IEEE fields has from the very beginning focused on education and we're an unsung leader worldwide in education in our fields of interest.

But even these most brilliant of individuals need a common language and set of agreed upon benchmarks to collaborate to design and enable the practical development of technology to ensure interoperability, promote safety and equality and that means the standard development. And IEEE standards do this because they are

developed through transparent, bottom-up, collaborative efforts, bringing together expert worldwide from cross Sectors. It is technologies like AI, advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, quantum computing as they evolve the, timely development of the standards is the fundamental necessity to allow them to be adapted and society as a whole to respond.

So in essence, education in our field provides the fuel for innovation and standards provide that ability to go further.

And together these are the critical links that form an unbreakable chain, enabling and empowering us to meet and master the challenges and realize the opportunities presented. And WSIS+20 is the opportunity to reflect, renew, and reimagine this process. We're very much a champion of the multistakeholder process that WSIS has come to represent and empower worldwide. Thank you very much.

>> MODERATOR: Thank you for that Kathleen. That touches on the challenge of ensuring equitable access to the level of high-end education that you are talking about all over the world. That is not the case. There is so much inequality at that level. That is an important challenge to look at. Janis, to come back to what you said. Yes, we have made enormous progress in connecting people, but there are still billions not connected. Many that are connected are not able to be connected meaningfully. Yes. Kathleen, also thank you for reminding us that technical standards and technical cooperation remains as important as the social and economic development cooperation.

>> KATHLEEN KRAMER: Very much so.

>> MODERATOR: Pierre, going to you. You manage an entity that is the AFNIC and involved in the WSIS process. What are your takeaways? What do you think, what have you learned? What should we draw on from the other process where there was the potential and opportunity and good of the Internet as Janis reminded us?

>> PIERRE BONIS: You will have to put on your head sets, that will bring us back to the good old days of WSIS when we were speaking five languages. Maybe this is kind of gotten the habit got lost since Geneva 2005.

So what I remember mainly of what happened at WSIS is Internet is still there. It has become mainstream. It is like running water when you turn on the tap. Shouldn't be issues with it. 20 years ago when we met, Civil Society, Private Sector, Governments, Authorities, technological community, we insisted on that. Internet was full of promises.

Today, Internet is a reality almost obvious. Of course, it can be bearing threats, but be mindful of this. Internet has grown in the last 20 years. The multistakeholder system has not been challenged. It has evolved. I don't want to be naive, but as Anriette was saying, you need to recognize that. That is good news. You need to remember, also, maybe 20 years ago, when the WSIS met more than 20 years ago, in 2003, in Geneva we were already in an international crisis situation. Today we can talk about tension. Very strong

tensions between the countries. I want to remind you that the beginning of the Iraqi war is March 2003.

It is not new we're talking about Internet and international cooperation of flows of ideas in a context of tensions, of accusations between North and South and East and West. And how have we managed from 20 years ago to get along and to agree on the promises of the Internet. Because we had this mix in the room, even though we were in an Intergovernmental Summit. This mix of expertise and expectations were not just represented by Governments but a number of other stakeholders for an entity that manages part of the critical infrastructure, only a small part of it, the dot FR domain, this World Summit for us represent a guarantee of stability of the underlying infrastructure of the Internet.

It was recognized as being a carrier of innovation. And like every infrastructure, it needs to remain stable. Not changing according to new trends or conflicts or disputes among the States. It should always allow for each part of the world to remain connected.

From this point of view, it was -- you can say that it was a success. Even though we still have reminders numerous times, even if the number of Internet has grown from 60% to 70% today. It is the remaining 2.5 billion world citizens are even still more victims of the Digital Divide than they were. The 80% -- the less you are connected, of course, the more people are connected the more the fact of not being connected is weighing hard on your shoulders.

This challenge has not been resolved.

>> MODERATOR: Thanks for much, Pierre Maria Fernanda, not just to talk about the challenges, but entering deeper, we have not that many months left of the WSIS+20 Review process. What do you think? What are the lessons we learned? The priorities we should be taking into account? And as we complete -- continue and complete this WSIS review process.

>> MARIA FERNANDA GARZA: Well, thank you. Good morning to everyone. ICC is a representative of 140 companies through several countries. Through advocacy, standards sets, we promote international trade responsible with this conduct and the Global approach to regulation.

And our members include not only the major leading companies, millions of SMEs and mid-size companies, business associations, chambers of commerce. And ICC has been the focal point for the WSIS process since it began in Geneva over 20 years ago. That is why we established the business action to support the Information Society initiatives to engage with the WSIS follow-up work streams. So ICC basis have been convening here every year, to take stock of the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines and chart a path forward together with partners from all stakeholders.

With this as a background, I know that the substantial progress has been made in implementing the WSIS vision.

And three key advancements includes expanding connectivity to covering 94% of the world's population. Deploying innovative digital

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solutions, and an increased application of the multistakeholder model across various levels of Digital Governance. Business innovation tied with the collective contributions of the multistakeholder community is the designated vehicle to drive the WSIS vision into the future.

But despite that there have been significant progress, recent developments continue to show that the multistakeholder model is not embraced or considered by all.

Indicating that continued challenges in extending the benefits for the next billions and this must be addressed. The multistakeholder model is how to leverage all stakeholder collective expertise to realize a better future. The WSIS+20 Review should aim to continue to strengthen, spread and enable this model.

Furthermore, to fully achieve the WSIS vision, ICTs must be accessible, affordable and relevant to the needs of everyone, everywhere.

And this requires policy frameworks that are build on stable legal and regulatory grounds on improving Global data flows that are built on trust and policy frameworks that take a holistic approach across economic, technical, social, cultural, and overarching Governance factors.

Finally, we urge that the WSIS+20 outcomes establish a more interconnected and inclusive framework for Digital Governance by integrating the commitments of the Global Digital Compact. We should avoid creating parallel duplicative processes. And instead leverage the strengthen and existing structures within the WSIS architecture, especially the IGF, which should become a permanent entity with sustainable funding.

ICC stands ready to continue to contribute to the Global Sector as we take forward the WSIS process in the coming decade.

>> MODERATOR: Interesting approach. I think the WSIS vision does direct us towards. Do you feel something like climate change should be part of the approach as we go into the next phase of WSIS?

>> MARIA FERNANDA GARZA: Absolutely. Everything is a part of this. We need technology to address the challenges of climate change and we need it to address other challenges.

>> MODERATOR: We have a few minutes left, because we started late. I want to ask each panelists, starting from Pierre up to Maria Fernanda. Keeping in mind the holistic approach, the nonduplication you reflected on, the achievements and remaining challenges. What is the one thing you most want to see as we review 20 years of WSIS and hopefully plan for the next 20 years?

And if you want to add in your one minute, something you don't want to see, you can add that as well.

One thing you want to see and optionally, one thing you don't want to see Pierre.

>> PIERRE BONIS: I will speak in English because not everyone has it in the ear.

>> MODERATOR: We can follow the transcript, so feel free to speak

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in French.

>> PIERRE BONIS: I want to see the inclusion of the new topics like AI and ITU is having a great event with AI for Good.

But others within the current framework, without creating different frameworks to deal with different or new technologies.

So what I want to see is the inclusion of the modernity within the current framework. And what I would not like to see is to see again the battle that we saw 20 years ago between a so-called multistakeholder model and the so-called Intergovernmental model. I think a lot of intelligence has been put in place since 20 years to bring these two approaches together, and the splits that we could see again would be a disaster for the future of the Internet Governance.

>> MODERATOR: Thanks, Pierre. Janis?

>> JANIS KARKLINS: Probably, I would like to see us not being dogmatic, and camping on ideas that we cherish ourselves. Where I'm going to is we have WSIS process which is 20 years now old. But we are also approaching the discussions about implementation of the Global Digital Compact. And as Maria Fernanda very explicitly said we should avoid duplications. If we would camp on our belief that WSIS is unique and should stay as is without looking at what is happening in the world, and those who negotiate the implementation of Global Digital Compact would say no, no, we don't want to see anything else but just this one, we will end up with two parallel processes, which would be very bad for -- from rational point of view and also from substantive point of view.

These processes are complementary, they should merge at one point under which title, it doesn't really matter. What matters is we're building inclusive digital society, where everyone can benefit from it.

>> MODERATOR: Thanks, Janis. Your Excellency.

>> PRASERT JANTARARUANGTONG: Thank you very much. One important thing is the power of working together. And that you talked before, the next topic is so important, climate change is so important, too. Thank you.

>> MODERATOR: Thanks, Your Excellency. Kathleen?

>> KATHLEEN KRAMER: In the end, the most important thing is collaborative leadership. That is not whoever can win the most votes but it needs to be based on merit. That is what -- that means multistakeholder input. That is the most important thing.

>> MODERATOR: Thanks, Kathleen. Maria Fernanda.

>> MARIA FERNANDA GARZA: The biologist said the problem is we have emotions, minimal institutions and God-like technologies. We don't just need to govern the technologies, we need to learn how to govern transformation itself. And that means building multistakeholder institutions that are not just rules based, but also change based.

>> MODERATOR: Thanks very much. Thanks to the panel. I do think we have achieved a lot, even if not enough. I can on a personal note,

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I was here in 2003, and in 2005, as a member of Civil Society, the association for progressive communications, large Civil Society network. Today I'm here as APC, but also as a member of Civil Society of the official South African Delegation. So that is also an achievement.

I think have you all actually summed it up. Janis, you are telling us to be pragmatic. We don't need to duplicate initiatives, but we also need to recognize the evolution, the change in scope, the additional topics that we need to address. But let's address them in a way that actually still provides common platforms for collaboration.

I think for public participation. I know that is the power of the WSIS Forum and of the power of the Internet Governance Forum. They're the public participation facilities. Dimensions of this process. Which should as Pierre said both multistakeholder and Intergovernmental. I think we had the guidelines from earlier this year that gives ways of integrating the processes recognizing they operate separately but both can be more inclusive and more accountable. So thanks very much to this panel. I hope that you inspire all the new people that are here.

I urge everyone to have a very productive, empowering WSIS High-Level Event. And to keep in mind that the power of the WSIS vision is immense. I mean, I'm speaking now -- I don't care how many people were here in 2003. I care that we keep this vision of people-centred inclusive Information Society at the heart.

Just another little final achievement. We have a woman as the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union. That is hard to imagine. As a woman in this space and see how it is transformed and how more prominent gender as a concern and women are in this space, it is something to celebrate. Thanks very much. Give the panel a huge round of applause.

(Applause)

>> HOST: Thank you to the panelists. We are about to begin the WSIS Prizes ceremony for 2025. Don't leave. We'll begin in a moment. The Prize Winners will be announced. We'll start in a moment, please. (Concluded)

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