General Assembly's overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes

Official Form for Written Submissions

A. Your Information

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B. Formal Input

The Government of the United States of America welcomes the international community's commitment to concluding the ten-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) at the High Level Meeting of the General Assembly. We celebrate this milestone and the progress we have made together over the last ten years, and we look forward to working with all stakeholders to achieve a positive outcome for the continued implementation of WSIS.

The High Level Meeting is the culmination of an important review of progress made towards achieving the WSIS vision and outcomes. We should use this opportunity to:

- Celebrate our achievements and successes;
- Recognize that all stakeholders have been instrumental in the process; and,
- Recommit ourselves to further multistakeholder implementation of the WSIS outcomes.

The High Level Meeting should reaffirm the principles agreed at the World Summit and focus on a review of our collective efforts to achieve those outcomes. It should highlight practical implementation measures that have proven successful in achieving the WSIS vision and underscore the importance of that vision as a driver for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

The High Level Meeting should also encourage continued efforts to connect the 4 billion people still without access to the Internet, while ensuring they also have the skills and liberty to use that connectivity safely, freely, and productively. It should once again reinforce the multistakeholder approach to Internet

governance, which serves as the basis for the Internet's growth, dynamism, and resilience. And the High Level Meeting should continue the mandate for the Internet Governance Forum as the premier international forum for multistakeholder dialogue on crosscutting Internet issues.

The High Level Meeting can accomplish these goals by including non-governmental stakeholders throughout the process and by producing an Outcome Document that focuses on the priorities outlined in the UNGA Resolution 68/302: taking stock of progress towards implementation of WSIS and addressing gaps and areas for continued focus.

1. **To what extent has progress been made on the vision of the people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in the ten years since the WSIS?**

   The High Level Meeting should take stock of the progress made towards WSIS implementation by focusing on the six main groups of WSIS outcomes that were identified by the CSTD ten-year review: (1) vision, (2) targets, (3) Action Lines, (4) multistakeholder participation, (5) financial mechanisms, and (6) Internet governance.

   Vision: "Our common desire and commitment to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society" is the heart of WSIS and the common vision that unites worldwide efforts towards implementation. By any measure, achieving this vision has been a resounding success. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are some of the most powerful tools we have to enable economic and social development and their positive impact around the world is a testament to the strength of the WSIS vision. More than three billion people and over 16 billion devices are connected to the Internet today. The connection between people, communities, governments, and machines enables economic and social development around the world on a revolutionary scale. ICTs are transforming markets, creating new industries and driving efficiency gains, improving healthcare services, expanding educational opportunities, empowering citizens, and connecting the world in ways unimaginable a decade ago. The economic benefits are widespread. The digital economy contributes 5 to 9 percent to total GDP in developed economies and is growing at 10 percent a year – faster than the global economy as a whole. Significantly, it is growing even faster in developing countries at between 15 and 25 percent a year. This remarkable and unprecedented growth is due in part to policy processes that are inclusive, sustainable, and flexible to changing technologies. The people-centered focus of WSIS underscores the complementary and mutually reinforcing relationships between ICTs, economic development, and respect for human rights.

   Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should reaffirm a WSIS Vision that is people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented. It should highlight ways in which the WSIS vision has improved the quality of life of all people and reinforce the importance of extending the benefits of that vision to all. Proposals calling for new governmental and intergovernmental action, exclusive to certain stakeholder groups, or oriented towards narrow political objectives or interests are inconsistent with this vision.

   Action Lines: The eleven WSIS Action Lines have helped organize and facilitate international efforts to achieve the WSIS vision. As part of the ten-year review of WSIS, the stakeholder community undertook an extensive review of the Action Lines through a Multistakeholder Preparatory Platform. The WSIS+10 High Level Event outcome document noted that the Action Lines have helped build "a common understanding of the desirability to realize a truly global interconnected and inclusive Information Society." Further, the Action Lines have provided the necessary structure and focus to efforts by UN organizations to implement WSIS, while maintaining sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing technologies and varied contexts.

Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should recognize the progress made, as elaborated in the comprehensive review of the Action Lines by the Multistakeholder Preparatory Platform and WSIS+10 High Level Event. Further, the High Level Meeting should recognize that the eleven Action Lines: (1) are sufficiently broad and flexible to continue to address development objectives; (2) remain relevant and can accommodate a rapidly evolving and dynamic environment; and (3) provide an existing and mature platform for using ICTs to help achieve the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Targets: Great progress has been achieved over the last decade towards meeting the ten indicative targets of the *Geneva Plan of Action*. These targets serve as global references for improving connectivity and access in the use of ICTs to achieve internationally agreed developmental goals. Countries are able to set additional targets at the national and local levels. For example, mobile subscriptions (target 10) increased from 20 percent of world population in 2003 to almost 100 percent in 2013. Similarly, computer ownership and use (also target 10) is expected to rise from 2 percent in 2008 to over 30 percent by 2020.   ICTs have also grown in ways unimaginable during the World Summit. Subscriptions to fixed telephony, once a ubiquitous network, have remained stagnant over the last decade while new technologies, including broadband, WiFi, and cloud computing, are providing connectivity to a growing number of people in all regions of the world. At the same time, ICTs are tools to achieve other goals, and they should complement and reinforce, not impede, other national and international developmental goals. The WSIS targets continue to provide guidance on priority areas for connectivity that should be taken into account when drafting national strategies and plans.

Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should encourage national governments to consider incorporating benchmarks, such as the WSIS Targets, in their national strategies and plans. The High Level Meeting should also reaffirm the role of ECOSOC in the follow-up of WSIS and the importance of continued work by the CSTD to collect and analyze data from multiple sources in the monitoring of progress made on WSIS Action Lines and targets.

Multistakeholder Participation: A hallmark of WSIS has been its emphasis on multistakeholder cooperation and implementation. We recognize that the Internet has flourished because of the bottom-up, consensus-based processes that embrace the private sector, civil society, academia, engineers and governments to participate in its development and governance. The rapid growth of the ICT sector is being driven by private sector innovation, investment, partnerships, and build-out of ICTs and telecommunication networks. Academia and civil society are highlighting the challenges faced by marginalized and at-risk communities, helping to shape norms and expectations, establishing initiatives that provide resources and training, and holding public and private sector leaders to high standards, challenging us all to perform better. The multistakeholder approach encourages broad and creative problem-solving, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability – principles that are vital to Information Society's rapid growth and continued success. This dynamic has been reflected in previous WSIS review processes, including the CSTD ten-year review, UNESCO events, and the WSIS+10 High Level Event.

Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should recognize the contributions of all stakeholders towards WSIS implementation and the critical role of the multistakeholder approach in enabling the success of WSIS. The meeting should underscore the value of multistakeholder approaches and encourage continued efforts to improve cooperation among all stakeholders.

Internet governance: The Tunis Agenda set a framework for development and governance of the Internet that acknowledged and continued the existing multistakeholder model. It also initiated two processes to support this effort:

- **Internet Governance Forum (IGF):** Ten IGF meetings will have been held in nine different countries by the time of the High Level Meeting. During that time, the IGF has continued to mature and improve and has become a critical, global forum for candid, multistakeholder dialogue on crosscutting Internet policy issues for stakeholders from around the world. The IGF benefits significantly from its inclusive, bottom-up, consensus-driven structure and process. The Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), as well as its open consultations and input processes, ensures the IGF remains a respected and neutral convener for sharing ideas and engaging in dialogue on important and current Internet issues. Participation in the IGF and its planning process has evolved and grown, and is increasingly diverse, with new entrants into the community from around the world both in the rotation of the MAG and in the workshops during the annual forum. Improvements to the IGF over the past decade have resulted from the hard work of the IGF community, including progress on recommendations made by the CSTD Working Group on improvements to the IGF. Additionally, continued work between IGFs, like Best Practice Forums and national and regional IGFs, serve as mechanisms to enrich and continue the worldwide dialogue. These processes connect the various stakeholder communities on important issues and have a lasting impact, including on discussions and negotiations at the national, regional, and global levels. For example, IGF proceedings have:

  o Increased awareness and interest in the Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams (FIRST), a critical forum for global, multistakeholder cooperation among computer security incident response teams;
  o Raised awareness about and facilitated increased participation in other important efforts, such as the Freedom Online Coalition and the Global Conference on Cyberspace, and the activities underway in regional organizations such as the Organization of American States, ASEAN, and the African Union Commission, among others; and,
  o Fostered participation in workshops and events around the world that address spam and build Internet Exchange Points; among many others.

- **Enhanced cooperation**: The Tunis Agenda also mandated a process towards enhanced cooperation to improve and strengthen the cooperation between and within existing institutions and organizations, and in forums like the IGF. This kind of enhanced multistakeholder cooperation has been a tremendous and ongoing success for the key issues of concern to governments and all stakeholders. Over the past decade, participation increased across all stakeholder groups and all regions in the existing Internet governance institutions and organizations. These entities have also enabled greater participation in their proceedings by choosing geographically diverse locations for meetings and offering remote access participation. Together with other stakeholders, these entities have also bolstered capacity-building efforts during and between meetings to support all stakeholders, particularly from the developing world, to participate more meaningfully in the multistakeholder process.

<u>Recommendation</u>: The High Level Meeting should extend the mandate of the IGF and reaffirm international support and commitment to the multistakeholder approach to Internet governance. The High Level Meeting should also look for even more ways to work together and encourage broad and robust participation by all stakeholders in the IGF and Internet governance institutions, as well as in other cooperative efforts that continue to implement WSIS outcomes.

- **Financial mechanisms:** The Tunis Agenda promoted investment in ICT infrastructure and actions to create an enabling environment for investment by the private sector. Many governments heeded that call and created policies and environments that encourage investment, which has resulted in rapid growth in the ICT sector since WSIS. Public-private partnerships, low-interest loans, and risk-mitigating financial instruments

have helped catalyze infrastructure investment. Still, access to mobile and fixed broadband remains prohibitively expensive in some countries where regulatory bottlenecks hamper infrastructure development.

Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should welcome efforts by governments to create enabling environments and highlight the tremendous investment by governments and the private sector towards building new technologies and ICT networks. The High Level Meeting should recognize that continued growth in this field depends on investment and other contributions by all stakeholders, not just governments, and it should call for continued focus on the role of private investment and public-private partnerships towards building the Information Society.

2. **What are the challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes?**

The High Level Meeting should do more than just catalog a list of accomplishments. It must also identify remaining challenges for the implementation of WSIS in order to guide practical implementation measures by all stakeholders. The CSTD ten-year review outlines five challenges for the implementation of WSIS outcomes: (1) the challenges of the digital divide, (2) rapidly changing technologies, (3) mainstreaming in broader development work, (4) education and capacity-building, and (5) monitoring and measurement.

Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should recognize that challenges remain and commit ourselves to continued efforts to address them through relevant and expert opportunities.

The United States adds four additional challenges to that list: (1) enabling environments, (2) stakeholder empowerment, (3) digital access and literacy, and (4) restrictive national policies that negatively impact the enjoyment of human rights.

- **Enabling Environments:** Governments have a crucial role to play in fostering access to the Internet. In the Alliance for Affordable Internet's 2014 report, the countries that achieved the highest rankings in the 2014 index all had strong government leadership and investment. One impediment to the build out and expansion of ICT networks and technologies is the existence of national and local policies that stifle or outright prohibit innovation and investment, including policies that forfeit progress to protect outdated, twentieth-century technologies, increase the power of governments, and/or restrict the free flow of information. Governments should support the deployment and use of ICT products and services by creating an enabling environment that rewards investment, spurs competition, promotes innovation, respects human rights, and facilitates the free flow of information. Fundamental to any post-2015 WSIS vision is a significant focus on the proper enabling environments at the regional, national, and local levels.

  Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should emphasize the need to implement national policies that encourage investment and competition and promote creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and the free flow of information.

- **Stakeholder Empowerment:** We live in an age where the key ingredients for innovation and growth are cooperation, collaboration, flexibility and ingenuity. Governments that have not embraced multistakeholder processes for Internet governance and policymaking have invariably missed out on the creativity and dynamism that industry, civil society, and the technical community bring to bear. Traditionally, governmental institutions and efforts that have incorporated stakeholders into their process and proceedings have emphasized the benefits that stakeholders bring to the conversation. Governments need the multistakeholder community because they play the largest role in innovation, problem-solving, and implementation of solutions. It is this community that operates, interconnects,

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uses, and builds on the ICT platforms. They are the subject matter experts, and they are the ones driving the evolution and growth of the Information Society. Governments should take steps to empower their citizens to participate meaningfully and the multistakeholder community should encourage those efforts. Policies should likewise respect human rights and empower social groups that are too often excluded from participating in the Information Society, including women, minorities, and rural and poor communities.

Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should reaffirm the essential role of all stakeholders in implementation of WSIS outcomes and call on the community to further empower all people to participate in the Information Society.

- **Digital Access and Literacy:** Even where access to the Internet is both available and affordable, some people do not have the skills or opportunities to use it. The international, multistakeholder community therefore must do more than provide access to more users. It must also work towards ensuring ICT platforms are affordable, useful, effective, and improve quality of life, and that the global digital citizenry has the education, infrastructure, and skills they need to use ICTs. The information society is constantly changing and requires users and innovators to acquire new skills. Research has shown strong correlation between the development of network infrastructure and the growth of local content. Digital literacy programs that teach new users how to effectively access and use the Internet when it is available are therefore vital. Further, we must work together at the national, regional, and global level to expand global awareness of existing threats and risks and empower users with the tools and skills they need to be able to use ICTs safely and in a way that protects their personal data.

Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should call on all stakeholders to recommit to efforts that go beyond merely striving for greater Internet penetration across the world. The High Level Meeting should aspire towards Internet access that is relevant and meaningful, and delivered to users that have the skills and opportunities to use it, while protecting their human rights and fundamental freedoms both offline and online, including freedom from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy and freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

- **National Public Policies:** Just as there are policy frameworks that enable access to the Information Society, there are also policies that restrict access. Government policies that block, restrict, or unduly interfere with the free flow of information, or fail to respect privacy and the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly while individuals are online, limit the growth of the Information Society and hinder our collective efforts to close the digital divide. The emphasis on respect for human rights in the WSIS framework, particularly the commitment to the Geneva Principles and the provisions in the Tunis Agenda, is one of its enduring strengths. The framework rightly recognizes that ICTs, respect for human rights, and economic development are integrally linked and inseparable. Further, the creation of new intergovernmental authorities or institutions to regulate the Internet would also result in rigid procedures, bureaucracy, political stalemate, and wasted time, which could stifle the innovation needed to develop solutions.

Recommendation: The High Level Meeting should acknowledge the adverse effect of repressive policies on efforts to close the digital divide. The High Level Meeting should reaffirm that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online as well as the importance of an open, interoperable internet.

3. **What should be the priorities in seeking to achieve WSIS outcomes and progress towards the Information Society, taking into account emerging trends?**

The High Level Meeting is a review of our collective efforts to achieve the WSIS vision and outcomes and focus on practical implementation measures that have served us well thus far. The High Level Meeting cannot address every issue related to the Information Society, nor is it capable of resolving every long-standing ICT debate. A review process should not renegotiate the original WSIS outcomes, attempt to overturn consensus outcomes reached in other processes, consider proposals previously rejected by the broader stakeholder community, or create new mechanisms to duplicate or supersede the work of existing organizations. Accordingly, the High Level Meeting should focus on the following priorities:

- **Reaffirm WSIS Principles:** The High Level Meeting should reaffirm the vision and principles agreed in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005 that have been the foundation of WSIS implementation for the past decade. The principles and consensus reached at the World Summit were the culmination of a process that spanned several years and included commitments to a shared agenda focused on respect for human rights, development, multistakeholder decision making, and an open, interoperable Internet. The High Level Meeting should reaffirm those outcomes and not try to renegotiate them.

- **Focus on Development:** The High Level Meeting should encourage continued practical implementation measures by all stakeholders that leverage ICTs to achieve developmental goals, including the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This can be accomplished by utilizing data to inform decision making and focusing on polices that foster capacity building in developing countries, innovation across all sectors, investment, and economic growth. The Action Lines are sufficiently broad and flexible enough to continue to address these objectives, while providing an existing and mature platform for contributing to the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda.

- **Continue to Connect:** The High Level Meeting should recognize the progress achieved since the World Summit towards bridging the digital divide. The High Level Meeting should also emphasize the power of connectivity to promote development and focus on ways of expanding connectivity and improving the quality of access. We need to build on this success to extend the benefits of affordable Internet for everyone. This can be accomplished by reflecting best practices and the positive impact of policies that foster an enabling environment and the free flow of information.

- **Reaffirm the Multistakeholder Approach:** The High Level Meeting must reaffirm the role of the multistakeholder community in building the Information Society. This community was active long before the World Summit, and it has only grown and continued to be an integral and inseparable component throughout implementation of WSIS outcomes over the past decade. WSIS requires further stakeholder engagement and inclusion to continue to be successful.

- **Continue the Mandate for the IGF**: The High Level Meeting outcome should continue the existing mandate for the IGF and reflect the stakeholder community's continued efforts to improve the IGF based on the recommendations of the CSTD Working Group on Improvements to the IGF.

- **Continue to leverage efforts that build confidence and security:** The High Level Meeting outcome should note the importance of safety and security to the future of the Information Society as ICTs continue to grow and become integral parts of society around the world. It should highlight that there is a range of activities underway globally in various fora to address threats, build capacity, and increase multistakeholder cooperation on this set of issues. Proposals that suggest that cybersecurity cooperation, and cooperation on related issues, is not occurring or should be managed by an intergovernmental process or institution have the potential to undermine ongoing progress at the national, regional, and global levels.

- **Promote Universal Human Rights:** The High Level Meeting should recognize and reaffirm that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online. Proposals seeking to provide international legitimacy for repressive policies should be rejected, as they would not only distort the nature of the Internet as an open and global platform, which is precisely what makes the Internet such a dynamic and valuable tool for all people, but also undermine the enjoyment of human rights.

- **Ensure Effective Follow-up:** The High Level Meeting should reaffirm the role of ECOSOC in the follow-up and review of WSIS and the importance of multistakeholder contributions and data from all sources for the ongoing review of WSIS outcomes. The High Level Meeting should note the importance of improvements to the measurement and collection of data related to WSIS implementation and measurement of the impact of ICTs on development and express appreciation for the annual reviews by the Secretary-General in this regard.

4. **What are general expectations from the WSIS + 10 High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly?**

The structure of the High Level Meeting should continue the open and transparent process that is the hallmark of other WSIS events and the catalyst for much of the success of WSIS. All relevant stakeholders have had a part in WSIS implementation, and they all deserve a voice in the High Level Meeting.

5. **What shape should the outcome document take?**

The Outcome Document should be concise, based on consensus work to date, and focused on a review of implementation and continued practical measures for achieving the WSIS vision. It should avoid seeking to resolve ICT policy issues which are being addressed in other, more appropriate fora or re-opening issues concluded elsewhere. To make efficient and effective use of our time, the Outcome Document should underscore and build upon the detailed work of the WSIS community to date. The CSTD ten-year review is based on inputs from WSIS stakeholders and aptly distills ten years' worth of work into a fact-based, comprehensive report that should serve as the basis for the outcome document, as mandated by UNGA 68/302. Likewise, the outcomes of other WSIS+10 events including the WSIS+10 Review Event "Towards Knowledge Societies for Peace and Sustainable Development" and the WSIS+10 High Level Event, provide comprehensive and holistic reviews of implementation of the WSIS Action Lines, as well as a vision for WSIS after 2015. We should ground our review on the conclusions of these processes and not duplicate their work.