

**JOINT STATEMENT OF THE GROUP OF FRIENDS ON DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
DELIVERED IN THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM SESSION ON
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

I am delivering this statement on behalf of members of the Group of Friends on Digital Technologies,¹ launched in November 2019 and comprising over 70 countries from all regions of the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that digital technologies are vital in our daily lives. They have served as essential means to suppress the COVID-19 pandemic, to respond to the crisis and to address a variety of pandemic-related issues. In many cases, as demonstrated in this High-level Political Forum, business and education continuity has largely depended on digital technologies. This has also reminded us that there is a gap we need to bridge: almost half of the world's population remains offline and while 87% of individuals in developed countries use the internet, in the least developed countries it does not get to 20%. These figures show that the digital gap between developed and developing countries is a reality we need to address. The pandemic has also demonstrated the need to counter misinformation.

In this regard, we renew our commitment to leave no one behind in the digital era by addressing the digital gap that is wider for those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations, such as the poor, women and girls, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, persons living in countries in conflict and post-conflict situations, older persons, young people, children, persons with disabilities, rural populations, indigenous peoples and local communities.

Mr. Chair,

The 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report points to the fact that Science, Technology and Innovation are important levers to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs and their targets, therefore it is more relevant than ever to harness their potential. In particular, we need to continue maximizing the benefits of powerful digital technologies, while mitigating their risks.

In this context, we welcome the role played by the Technology Facilitation Mechanism launched in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the inter-agency task team on science, technology and innovation and the 10-member group of experts involved in its work; the STI Forum and the Online Platform on existing STI initiatives, mechanisms

¹ Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Norway, Panama, Peru, Qatar, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Zimbabwe, and the European Union.

and programmes. In particular, we look forward to the STI Forum postponed to 2021 and the full operationalization of the Online Platform. We congratulate the launch of the first phase of the Global Pilot Programme on STI for SDGs Roadmaps as well as the related Guidebook for the Preparation of STI for SDGs Roadmaps. We also welcome the role played by the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, and the UN Technology Bank for LDCs.

The group recognizes the key role to be played by all stakeholders, collaboration among governments, private sector, civil society and academia, among others, will prove pivotal in order to effectively use digital technologies for achieving the SDGs and their targets. Furthermore, we would like to underline the importance of advancing in this endeavor while protecting and promoting human rights and recognizing that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, including the right to privacy.

Let me conclude by thanking the Secretary-General for his report “Roadmap for Digital Cooperation”, we are ready to constructively engage in the upcoming discussions.

Thank you.