

**Informal Meeting of the General Assembly
to hear a briefing by the members of the
Independent High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation**

**Statement by
Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin
Permanent Representative**

10 June 2019

Madam President,

Thank you very much for convening this briefing by the members of the independent high-level panel on Digital Cooperation.

2. I also thank the panelists for candidly laying out the opportunities and challenges that Digital technologies pose to all of us.

3. Listening to the panelists, it is obvious that conversations on digital technologies are not merely discussions on technology. They subsume important issues relating to human and social behaviour. They include key objectives about cooperation and compassion. They relate to development as well as diplomacy. They collapse the distance between the real and the virtual; between trade and traditions and between war and peace.

4. What struck me is that whether we like it or not, new technologies are changing existing relationships between citizen and community; between business and state and indeed between states and the international system as a whole.

5. These changes are not only about venturing into uncharted territory, but they are also happening in an uncharted manner. Indeed, some say they are happening in a vacuum.

6. International institutions have yet to provide adequate space and opportunities for discussion of the various propositions in play. In short, we are not faring well in addressing these issues globally.

7. Around the world, there are some very polarising debates about data protection frameworks, human rights regimes and security policies.

8. I would, therefore, also like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his foresight in setting up this panel to study the transformative impact of digitization across societies to address the needs of a safe and inclusive digital future for all humanity.

Madam President,

9. What we discern from a quick reading of the report is that the spread of digital technologies has not only revolutionised our ability to communicate with others and to share and access knowledge, but has also offered much needed solutions for ending extreme poverty, to promoting inclusive economic growth and decent work, to achieving universal literacy, and doubling the productivity of small farmers.

10. While digital technologies are rapidly transforming societies and economies, they are also creating unprecedented challenges. Digital technologies have brought new and serious concerns, including invasion of privacy, promotion of misinformation, infiltration of critical infrastructure through cyber-attacks, threat to human rights, and the issue of the growing digital divide.

11. According to a well-regarded recent study, 65% of today's school children will eventually be employed in jobs that have yet to be invented. This not only has significant implications on how these children have to be educated and trained. It also implies that the current workforce may have to question the longevity of their existing employment and how they can ensure they are earning a living in the mid-term, given the changing nature of the labour market and the jobs available. Are there some thoughts that any of the panelists can share with us on this issue?

12. While the speed and scale of digitization is increasing rapidly, the agility, responsiveness and scope of cooperation and governance mechanisms need some serious catching up to do.

13. As such, digital technologies provide us all a unique opportunity to shape our future. They also place a momentous responsibility on our shoulders to ensure that these transformations will have a positive impact.

14. The unique benefits and profound risks arising from the dramatic increase in computing power and interconnectivity in the digital age falls in the realm of the "known unknowns".

15. Thus, in many ways, your report seems to me is a call for enhanced multi-stakeholder digital cooperation, involving governments, civil society, academics, technologists, marginalized groups and the private sector.

16. Such cooperation must be grounded in common human values such as inclusiveness, respect, human-centeredness, human rights, international law, transparency and sustainability.

17. To capture the power of digital technologies, there is a need to cooperate on the broader ecosystems that enable digital technologies to be used in an inclusive manner. This will require policy frameworks that directly support economic and social inclusion.

18. This requires dialogue and partnerships. It also requires a desire to transcend 20th century divides of North and South, East and West.

19. The effects of digital cooperation on human well-being and the implications on society need to be elevated and collectively examined in a serious discourse. The Report presented today provides us that opportunity. Perhaps, as the UN approaches the 75th anniversary, there is an opportunity for all us to begin that effort here.

Mr. Secretary-General,

20. Thank you for providing us “food for thought”. We look forward to closely studying the recommendations made by the Panel and I assure you of India’s willingness to constructively engage on the issue.