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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Digital Inclusion and Transformation

Astana, 3–5 September 2024

Astana Ministerial Declaration on Digital Inclusion and Transformation in Asia and the Pacific

1. We, the representatives of the members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific participating in the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Digital Inclusion and Transformation, met in Astana from 3 to 5 September 2024.

2. We note the Asia-Pacific Digital Ministerial Conference 2022, organized by the Republic of Korea in collaboration with the secretariat of the Commission and held in Seoul on 10 November 2022 under the theme "Shaping our common future" with a view to fostering digital cooperation for an inclusive and prosperous future in the Asia-Pacific region.

3. We recall General Assembly resolutions 78/132 of 19 December 2023 on information and communications technologies for sustainable development, 78/160 of 19 December 2023 and 70/125 of 16 December 2015, as well as Commission resolution 72/10 of 19 May 2016.

4. We note the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels.

5. We recall Commission resolution 78/1 of 27 May 2022, entitled "Bangkok Declaration Commemorating the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: a Common Agenda to Advance Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific".

6. We also recall General Assembly resolutions 78/265 of 21 March 2024 on seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development and 78/311 of 1 July 2024 on enhancing international cooperation on capacity-building of artificial intelligence.

7. We further recall Commission resolution 79/10 of 19 May 2023, in which the Commission decided to convene a ministerial conference on digital inclusion and transformation to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and regional technology initiatives, including the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, in line with the provisions of the conference structure of the Commission.

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8. We recognize that there is a pressing need to overcome the major impediments that developing countries face in engaging with and accessing new technologies, such as an appropriate enabling environment, sufficient resources, infrastructure, education and literacy, capacity, investment and connectivity, without prejudice to national laws.

9. States are strongly urged to take steps with a view to the avoidance of, and refrain from, any unilateral measure not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impedes the full achievement of economic and social development by the population of the affected countries, and that hinders the well-being of their population.

10. We acknowledge the role of information and communications technologies in enhancing resilience to climate change and disaster risk reduction towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

11. We emphasize that access to digital technologies and related capacity-building, including for young people, older persons, women, persons with disabilities and people living in remote and rural communities, are fundamental to reducing the digital divide, fostering inclusive growth, alleviating poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals in Asia and the Pacific.

12. We reaffirm that there are different approaches and tools available to each country for scaling up digital innovations, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, and recognize the need for context-specific approaches in developing and implementing digital solutions, taking into account national and regional contexts and the varying levels of socioeconomic development of members and associate members.

13. We note that a gender digital divide persists in women's access to and use of information and communications technologies and tools, including in education, employment, entrepreneurship and other areas of economic and social development, and in this regard we welcome the many initiatives that are aimed at promoting the equal participation and the empowerment of women and girls in the digital age, such as the International Girls in ICT Day of the International Telecommunication Union.

14. We reiterate that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has underlined the importance of closing digital connectivity gaps and enhancing secure and affordable access, as well as the potential contributions of digital applications, such as e-learning solutions, for promoting digital inclusion, the digital economy and poverty reduction, and thus we highlight the importance of regional cooperation among members and associate members with a view to fostering digital innovation for sustainable development and promoting inclusive digital economies and societies by making full use of the potential of United Nations agencies and other organizations with relevant mandates and expertise, as well as multi-stakeholders, within their respective roles and responsibilities, and regional and subregional platforms, including, inter alia, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, as appropriate and within existing resources, in order to promote digital innovations and mitigate digital risks for accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, as necessary, taking into account the need to eliminate duplication of effort, to strengthen cooperation in science, innovation and digital solutions, on voluntary and mutually agreed terms.

15. We express our commitment to international and multilateral cooperation and recognize the importance of digital cooperation through various regional networks, such as the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development, the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology, the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization, as appropriate, avoiding duplication, within their respective mandates, to, inter alia, bridge the digital divide, strengthen digital connectivity, address and enhance digital trust, share good policies, practices and lessons learned, and promote inclusive and sustainable digital economies and societies, leaving no one behind.

16. We welcome the convening of national and regional innovation forums and events hosted by members and associate members to promote innovation for inclusive and collaborative approaches to technology that accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

17. We recognize the potential of innovative digital technologies and solutions to advance sustainable development, foster inclusive growth, reduce poverty and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, [1] while also recognizing the negative impacts of such technologies and solutions, including the perpetuation of divides within and between countries, and the need to mitigate them, as well as the opportunities for and risks and challenges to the enjoyment, promotion and protection of human rights.

18. We welcome further consideration of the proposal of the Government of Kazakhstan for the establishment of a digital solutions centre for sustainable development, under the auspices of the Commission as part of its conference structure, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary funding, while paying due consideration to the avoidance of duplication with specialized organizations and other bodies subsidiary to the Commission.

19. We request the Executive Secretary, in implementing the present Ministerial Declaration, to support regional cooperation among members and associate members with a view to fostering digital innovation for sustainable development and promoting inclusive digital economies and societies by making full use of the potential of United Nations agencies and other organizations with relevant mandates and expertise, as well as multi-stakeholders, within their respective roles and responsibilities, and regional and subregional platforms, including, inter alia, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, as appropriate and within existing resources, taking into account the need to eliminate duplication of effort, by:

(a) Promoting, as appropriate, regional and subregional digital connectivity, inclusion and transformation, including through the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026;

(b) Providing technical assistance, policy analysis and capacity-building support, within existing resources, in accordance with countries' needs and priorities, while also enhancing awareness creation and knowledge-sharing among members and associate members on promoting digital innovation, on addressing and enhancing digital trust and inclusion, on

[1] General Assembly resolution 70/1.

leveraging emerging digital opportunities and on mitigating digital risks and challenges for sustainable development, as appropriate, within the scope of the mandate of the Commission;

(c) Continuing to provide technical assistance, policy analysis and capacity development and promote knowledge-sharing among members and associate members, in particular least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, on digital connectivity and transformation through regional cooperation, as appropriate, to advance inclusive digital connectivity and transformation;

(d) In accordance with the terms of reference of the Commission[2] and its resolution 78/2, and subject to voluntary contributions, commissioning an independent feasibility study on the role, structure and financing of the proposed digital solutions centre for sustainable development to be established in Kazakhstan, the terms of reference for which study will be submitted to the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission for its consideration, and establishing an ad hoc working group, to be convened through voluntary funding contributions, open to all members and associate members, with online participation available, to review in a transparent manner the outcome of the independent feasibility study and recommend a road map for strengthening the sharing of practical digital solutions for the Asia-Pacific region, while recognizing the need to avoid duplication of efforts vis-à-vis other regional institutions of the Commission and specialized organizations, and to report on its progress to the Commission at its eighty-first session;

(e) Considering convening an Asia-Pacific regional ministerial conference on digital themes, to be decided at the next session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation.

20. We express our profound gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Digital Inclusion and Transformation.

[2] E/2009/39-E/ESCAP/65/32, annex IV, para. 1 (d).