

# INITIAL COMMENTS FROM THE SWISS GOVERNMENT ON THE REPORT OF THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON DIGITAL COOPERATION

September 16 2019

## 1. Introductory remarks

Switzerland welcomes the timely Report from the **High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation**, established by the UN Secretary General last year, aptly titled “*The Age of Digital Interdependence*”.

It includes **significant recommendations on improving digital cooperation**, inter alia, proposing that “*as a matter of urgency, the UN Secretary-General facilitate an agile and open consultation process to develop updated mechanisms for global digital cooperation*” based on a set of three modalities explained in the Report as a starting point.

The **HLP Report** and its **recommendations** represent an important milestone and **opportunity for us all to enhance our digital cooperation arrangements**.

We hope that the Report contributes to **removing existing bottlenecks** and to ensuring that the **many actors** who discuss the different aspects of digital governance and make decisions according to their roles and responsibilities **may collaborate in a more effective, holistic, inclusive and accountable way** - and develop pragmatic solutions.

We believe that any resulting innovations should build to the furthest extent possible **on existing institutions, processes and arrangements** – by creating a **network of networks** of institutions and actors that cooperate (and where necessary regulate) **bearing in mind growing interdependencies**.

In this sense, **processes like the IGF** have significantly contributed to improve cooperation in the digital environment.

## 2. Initial comments on the specific Recommendations

Switzerland warmly welcomes the Recommendations on developing an inclusive digital economy and society, especially the focus set on the Sustainable Development Goals, and the multistakeholder approach envisaged in this regard.

The UNSG should take a leading role in convening all the stakeholders addressed in **Recommendations 1A-1D**, benefitting from the IGF process as a framework for developing specific multistakeholder partnerships oriented to carrying forward the recommendations of the Report.

Regarding **Recommendation 2**, we believe that improving human and institutional capacity is a precondition for a meaningful participation in the digital society. The IGF-Secretariat could cooperate with existing initiatives which aim to improve the information on digital policies and building capacity in various fields. Switzerland is ready to encourage synergies with Swiss initiatives, such as the Digital Watch of the Geneva Internet Platform. The IGF-Secretariat could act as coordinating node of a network of global and regional helpdesks, within the improved architecture proposed under the IGF+ model.

Regarding **Recommendation 3**, Switzerland agrees that international law, including human rights and fundamental freedoms, fully apply to the digital realm. Efforts within the UN should

build on existing frameworks, such as the UN Human Rights Council and the OHCHR. The IGF could be used to conduct in-depth consultations with the private sector, civil society and the wider public to clarify the principles regarding the application of human rights in the digital age. RightsCon and other digital human rights initiatives should be part of this process. The implementation of Recommendation 3B would be best placed under the framework of an improved IGF. Regarding Recommendation 3C, the IGF framework could be used in order to convene all regional and international bodies and initiatives active in the field of AI standards, with a view to facilitating effective exchange of information and good practices and the pooling of efforts, e.g. regarding certification schemes.

On **Recommendation 4** Switzerland agrees that a Global Commitment could serve to build on and create momentum behind the voluntary norms that have been and are being elaborated at the international level, such as in past and present UN Groups of Governmental Experts and in the current Open-Ended Working Group. It should aim to loosely coordinate, in a multistakeholder process, the various existing initiatives in the field of digital trust and security, such as the Global Commission on the Stability of Cyberspace and specific outcomes from multistakeholder dialogues such as the Geneva Dialogue on Responsible Behavior in Cyberspace and recent calls for action, such as the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace. Also in this case an enhanced IGF could serve as appropriate framework for multistakeholder collaboration and progress.

Finally, on **Recommendation 5**, we are of the view that its core is represented by the three different architectural models proposed therein. While elements from the “Co-Gov” model merit further consideration, we believe that the UNSG should prioritize action on improving the IGF on the basis of the “IGF+” proposal. The IGF counts already with a comprehensive mandate established in the Tunis Agenda on the Information Society. As set out in the HLP Report, the IGF needs such substantive improvements in order to answer the growing needs in digital cooperation and governance. In this sense, the building blocks for improvements provided under the IGF+ proposal would help the IGF in increasing its relevance for UN agencies, private, civil society and governmental actors, by:

- enabling it to develop meaningful intersessional work through enhanced policy networks;
- better supporting and orienting stakeholders worldwide in the field of digital policy;
- contributing to coordinating follow-up actions oriented to implementing discussions had at the annual forum through a strategic advisory group, which should encompass global leaders from all stakeholder groups;
- developing tangible solutions with the new incubator and accelerator;

### **3. General comments on the Follow-up to the Report**

Consistent with the Executive Summary of the Report “[...] if we are to deliver on the promise of digital technologies for the SDGs, including the above-mentioned priority action areas, and avoid the risks of their misuse, **we need purposeful digital cooperation arrangements.**”

In our view, **the IGF+ proposal should be prioritized**, as the enhanced IGF framework would help to channel and coordinate the actions envisaged under recommendations 1-4.

The UNSG could present his initial ideas on how to implement IGF+ at the IGF Meeting in Berlin in November 2019, with an ensuing multistakeholder consultation process back-to-back or in parallel to the IGF 2020 preparations. Switzerland is willing to assist in the logistics of such meetings in Geneva.

The consultations could then crystallize in fall 2020 in a **multistakeholder “Global Commitment for Digital Cooperation”**. This document, developed in a bottom-up process, would enshrine the shared values, principles, understandings and objectives for an improved global digital cooperation architecture included in the HLP Report. It would **also lay down the improvements made to the IGF based on the IGF+ proposal**, within the mandate established for the Forum by the Tunis Agenda on the Information Society. In order to signal new dynamism and phase in digital policy, the branding of the IGF architecture could be updated, highlighting “Digital Cooperation” as a new terminology (e.g. the strategic advisory group could be named “Digital Cooperation Executive Board”). Such an updated terminology would signal the new developments within digital field beyond the Internet as such.

On the occasion of the commemoration of UN's 75th anniversary in 2020 such a Commitment could be endorsed by the international community.

The build-up for the 2020 IGF would in parallel serve to germinate, form and develop the multistakeholder alliances needed in order to implement Recommendations 1-4 of the HLPDC. Switzerland is keen to participate in such bottom-up initiatives.

Finally, Switzerland is keen to engage and assist in the UNSG's ensuing actions and consultations (both in Geneva and New York). Given the broad spectrum of opportunities and challenges deriving from digital transformations, we believe that the **underlying approach should be as inclusive and holistic as possible, based on the ideas (premises) of multi-stakeholderism and multi-disciplinarity**, which are nowadays **best embodied in the IGF**.

In this regard, we also see very strong links to the UN's – as well as other institutions/organizations' – work outside of NY, especially in Geneva.

Switzerland is willing to **support the efforts to update our global cooperation arrangements** - putting them up to speed with the challenges and opportunities of our common digital future.

## Annex

### HLPDC Recommendations

An inclusive digital economy and society

*1A: We recommend that by 2030, every adult should have affordable access to digital networks, as well as digitally-enabled financial and health services, as a means to make a substantial contribution to achieving the SDGs. Provision of these services should guard against abuse by building on emerging principles and best practices, one example of which is providing the ability to opt-in and opt-out, and by encouraging informed public discourse.*

*1B: We recommend that a broad, multi-stakeholder alliance, involving the UN, create a platform for sharing digital public goods, engaging talent and pooling data sets, in a manner that respects privacy, in areas related to attaining the SDGs.*

*1C: We call on the private sector, civil society, national governments, multilateral banks and the UN to adopt specific policies to support full digital inclusion and digital equality for women and traditionally marginalised groups. International organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations should strengthen research and promote action on barriers women and marginalised groups face to digital inclusion and digital equality.*

*1D: We believe that a set of metrics for digital inclusiveness should be urgently agreed, measured worldwide and detailed with sex disaggregated data in the annual reports of institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, other multilateral development banks and the OECD. From this, strategies and plans of action could be developed.*

Human and institutional capacity

*2A: We recommend the establishment of regional and global digital help desks to help governments, civil society and the private sector to understand digital issues and develop capacity to steer cooperation related to social and economic impacts of digital technologies.*

Human rights and human agency

*3A: Given that human rights apply fully in the digital world, we urge the UN Secretary-General to institute an agencies-wide review of how existing international human rights accords and standards apply to new and emerging digital technologies. Civil society, governments, the private sector and the public should be invited to submit their views on how to apply existing human rights instruments in the digital age in a proactive and transparent process.*

*3B: In the face of growing threats to human rights and safety, including those of children, we call on social media enterprises to work with governments, international and local civil society organisations and human rights experts around the world to fully understand and respond to concerns about existing or potential human rights violations.*

*3C: We believe that autonomous intelligent systems should be designed in ways that enable their decisions to be explained and humans to be accountable for their use. Audits and certification schemes should monitor compliance of AI systems with engineering and ethical standards, which should be developed using multi-stakeholder and multilateral approaches. Life and death decisions should not be delegated to machines. We call for enhanced digital cooperation with multiple stakeholders to think through the design and application of these standards and principles such as transparency and non-bias in autonomous intelligent systems in different social settings.*

Trust, security and stability

*4A. We recommend the development of a Global Commitment on Digital Trust and Security to shape a shared vision, identify attributes of digital stability, elucidate and strengthen the implementation of norms for responsible uses of technology, and propose priorities for action.*

Global digital cooperation

*5A: We recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the UN Secretary-General facilitate an agile and open consultation process to develop updated mechanisms for global digital cooperation, with the options discussed in Chapter 4 as a starting point. We suggest an initial goal of marking the UN's 75th anniversary in 2020 with a "Global Commitment for Digital Cooperation" to enshrine shared values, principles, understandings and objectives for an improved global digital cooperation architecture. As part of this process, we understand that the UN Secretary-General may appoint a Technology Envoy.*

*5B: We support a multi-stakeholder "systems" approach for cooperation and regulation that is adaptive, agile, inclusive and fit for purpose for the fast-changing digital age.*