

UNITED NATIONS



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MR. LIU ZHENMIN

UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS,

Opening Remarks

at the

15th Annual Internet Governance Forum
Internet Governance in the Age of Uncertainty
OPENING SESSION

Monday, 9 November 2020 - 14:00-15:30 UTC

[MODERATOR OPENS THE SESSION AND INTRODUCES USG LIU]

Thank you, Jonathan, for that kind introduction.

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Colleagues and friends,

Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening.

On behalf of United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, I welcome you to the official opening of the 15th Internet Governance Forum and its High-level Leaders Track.

Due to a schedule conflict, the Secretary-General is not able to join us at this Opening Session. But we will have the honor of his address at the Closing Session next Tuesday.

And due to COVID-19, this year’s Internet Governance Forum is being convened online under the motto “Virtually Together”.

We have thousands of participants registered online, all around the world, in various channels.

First, I have the honour to invite His Excellency, Ambassador Volkan Bozkir, President of the United Nations General Assembly, to address the IGF.

[PGA’s REMARKS]

We thank the President of the General Assembly for his opening remarks and for his support to the IGF.

Please allow me now to give the floor to the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), His Excellency, Ambassador Munir Akram.

[ECOSOC PRESIDENT REMARKS]

Thank you, Mr. President, for your remarks. We will report to the Council the outcome of this year’s IGF discussion.

[USG PROCEEDS TO DELIVER HIS OPENING REMARKS]

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Allow me now to share some brief points about this year’s IGF before we move to the High-Level Leaders’ Dialogue.

The 2020 IGF is convened against the backdrop of COVID-19 under the theme - “Internet for human resilience and solidarity”.

While digital technologies were available prior to the onset of the pandemic, the devastating impact of COVID-19 has laid bare the importance of Internet-based technologies for our livelihoods. Indeed, we have seen significant digital transformation over the past months. And this digital acceleration is likely to continue.

Last year in Berlin, the UN Secretary-General, together with Chancellor Merkel, called on us to build the IGF into a platform where all stakeholders can come together to:

- share policy expertise,**
- debate emerging technology issues,**
- agree on some basic common principles, and**
- take these ideas back to the appropriate norm-setting fora.**

This year, in the virtual world, I am happy to see that we are continuing to work together in transforming the IGF into the vision the Secretary-General laid out in Berlin.

This year's programme includes more than 200 sessions that focus on four main thematic tracks: Data, Environment, Inclusion, and Trust.

In the High-Level Leaders Track, discussions will be centered around *Internet Governance in the Age of Uncertainty*.

Tomorrow's parliamentary roundtable will be on building trust in the age of COVID-19 response, and on how the international community can recover together.

Last week, as part of the Pre-event programme, the IGF 2020 global Youth Summit was successfully organized. The IGF is providing a platform for youth to have their say in shaping the global Internet policy as leaders of future generations.

As we continue with our dialogue, I encourage all participants to keep in mind four issues:

First, let us not lose sight of the digital divides.

In the least developed countries, only 19 per cent of individuals were online in 2019. We are leaving a large majority behind.

We need solutions that help bridge the digital divides so that the benefits of digital technologies can reach those being left behind, unconnected.

Second, let us eliminate the gender digital divide.

In all regions of the world, especially in LDCs, more men than women are using the Internet. Eliminating this divide should be mainstreamed into women's empowerment initiatives.

Third, let us make sure that the Internet is economically within reach for all.

Affordable access is still a big challenge for many. Even for this virtual IGF, there are participants who want to join but are struggling to get connected.

Fourth, it is time to invest more in digital literacy and capacity development.

Many people struggle to connect due to lack of digital skills. And some are missing relevant content in their local languages.

I am aware that the IGF community has been working together to find solutions to these problems. Let me assure you that the UN family will intensify our efforts to make a positive impact in this endeavor.

And UN DESA remains fully committed to digital cooperation, and most importantly to work with the IGF stakeholder groups to continue strengthening the IGF.

I wish you a productive meeting.

Thank you.

[MODERATOR TAKES OVER AND STARTS THE HIGH-LEVEL LEADER'S DIALOGUE]