

**WSIS Forum 2021 High-Level Policy Session 7:  
Inclusiveness, Access to Information and Knowledge for All**

*Virtual event*

**24 March 2021**

***Welcoming Remarks***

**Mario Maniewicz  
Director, Radiocommunication Bureau**

---

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening to all,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the WSIS Forum 2021. I would like to extend a warm welcome to H.E. Mr. Maxim Parshin, Deputy Minister of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation and WSIS Forum 2021 Chairman, as well as to our other distinguished speakers for this High-Level Policy Session on inclusiveness, access to information and knowledge for all and the media. We are honored to have you with us today. If this were a physical event, we would be hosting you at our ITU premises in Geneva. It will hopefully be the case next year.

I see the WSIS Forum as a great opportunity to learn about the policies and the activities that are being carried out by different stakeholders. And by doing so, we can share best practices and coordinate the implementation of these activities in order to advance the development goals. In this virtual format we have been reaching out to all regions. I have recently welcomed countries from the Caribbean to hear about their achievements and remaining challenges.

Since the beginning of Covid-19, we have observed a high demand for information and knowledge in general, and for digital content, in particular. This has had a consequential impact of increasing the need for broadcasting and internet media.

In fact, media and communication services have played a key role during these difficult times. They have ensured the continuation and enabled the transformation of the way people learn, work, entertain themselves and connect to their friends and family.

Broadcasting services have been an essential means to inform, entertain and educate the population. In 2020, during the peak of the pandemic, broadcast television services experienced their highest levels of viewing in many years. They were regarded as a highly trustworthy source of information amidst the surge of fake news. Moreover, broadcast radio was considered one of the most accessible and inclusive means of information, reaching both literate and illiterate populations.

Broadband connectivity also became vitally important during the lockdown. And several Administrations have prioritized in their political agenda the need to improve connectivity as a first step to promote inclusiveness and provide access to information and knowledge.

As we all have witnessed, media contributes to the freedom of expression and plurality of information, and communications has become the basis of our digital economy.

The ITU, together with our member administrations, has been consistently working to develop strategies and policies for digital inclusion, in particular for the empowerment of women and girls, persons with disabilities and other persons with specific needs. But more work needs to be done.

According to the ITU Report Facts and figures of 2020, there are clear connectivity gaps that still need to be addressed, between urban-rural areas, between gender, and developed and developing countries. Insufficient skills and affordability of services are often mentioned as an impediment to effective ICT use. These are some of the challenges faced by society to promote inclusiveness and close the digital divide.

In the ITU Radiocommunications Sector, we convene the experts in mobile, fixed, broadcasting and satellite technologies to support the development of radiocommunication services that have the potential to close the digital divide.

This includes the development of technical and regulatory standards for television and radio broadcasting, and broadband services.

Our work is founded on the principle of international cooperation and collaboration. In the ITU-R, Administrations, service providers, manufacturers, academia and standardization bodies come together to develop global radiocommunication regulations and standards that are then incorporated by countries throughout the world.

We are striving to ensure all people, independent of gender, race, religion or disabilities have access to accessible and affordable services. We believe that ICTs have a transformative power to remove barriers and change lives. It empowers girls and women, persons with disabilities and persons with other needs.

I call upon leaders around the world to ensure all people have access to essential ICT services and to information and knowledge. And I look forward to continuing working with all WSIS stakeholders to ensure we move from theory to practice, from principle to reality, from words to action.

Thank you very much.