2nd ITU-ACADEMIA PARTNERSHIP MEETING

Atlanta, Georgia, USA, 2-3 December 2019

Opening remarks

Dr Susan Teltscher, Head, Capacity and Digital Skills Development Division, ITU/BDT

Dr Rafael Bras, Provost of the Georgia Institute of Technology

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues,

Good morning.

On behalf of ITU, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 2nd ITU-Academia Partnership meeting which is held under the theme "Developing skills for the digital era".

Let me first of all thank Georgia Tech for having so graciously accepted to host this meeting here in Atlanta. Georgia Tech became an ITU academic member in 2013 and since then we have been collaborating in a number of areas, in particular related to the ITU work on standardization, but also in the ITU development sector. We are very lucky that our event is hosted by such a prestigious University. Thank you very much, Dr Bras, and my particular thanks to Michael Best and his team.

This event is held back-to-back with the ITU Kaleidoscope Conference, which will take place this Wednesday through Friday. I hope that many of you will take the opportunity and attend both events.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference is concerned with the impact of the digital transformation on teaching and learning. It is now widely acknowledged that the digital transformation requires new sets of skills and competencies. It will also require

that organizations are flexible and adaptable to change. Institutions involved in building knowledge and developing workforce skills, such as Universities, need to understand the pace and direction of the change in order for them to respond accordingly.

The discourse on the types of skills required by the digital transformation, and on the problem of skills shortage and how to address it, has been with us for a number of years now.

It is estimated that 95% of decent jobs in the near future will require some sort of digital skills. Organizations are struggling to find people with such skills. Even in the OECD countries, only 5% of the population know how to write a computer programme.

According to McKinsey, the top ten emerging jobs in the next few years will almost all be linked to the digital transformation. They include jobs such as data analysts and scientists, AI and machine learning specialists, software and app developers and analysts, big data specialists and digital transformation specialists. Other types of skills which are often lacking in the industry include e-commerce-related skills, data protection experts and - of course – cybersecurity specialists.

It is therefore our shared responsibility to rethink the educational system in order to cope with the new demand. In this digital era, continuous education becomes essential, and reskilling and upskilling of the workforce is now common practice in many large corporations. This is why Universities are such key players in this debate.

ITU, as the lead UN Agency for digital development, is a key stakeholder in shaping the digital future. Indeed, at the core of ITU's mandate and activities it to develop capacities and skills for our membership. We do this through many different channels and approaches. For example, we develop and deliver training programmes in a wide area of fields, ranging from spectrum management, ICTs and climate change, to IoT and cybersecurity. We are engaged in many partnerships with training institutions (including universities) and in particular with the global ITU Centers of Excellence network. Let me acknowledge the presence of some of our Centers here this week.

All of our capacity development activities are implemented under the umbrella of the ITU Academy. The ITU Academy is also our main e-learning platform and it is used by many of our partners.

Our target audiences are many. In the past, we have mostly focused on professionals in the telecom and ICT industries, and government officials. But the need to also train citizens at the basic digital skills level has become more and more evident. This is why we launched two months ago a new programme called Digital Transformation Center Initiative, in partnership with Cisco. The core objective of the Initiative is to reach out to poor and remote communities, mostly in developing countries, and train people on basic digital skills so that they will not remain excluded from the ongoing digital transformation. Indeed, according to our data, the lack of digital skills is one of the main barriers that keep people from using the Internet.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Developing the right skills for the digital era is a topic of common interest between ITU and academic institutions.

This is why we decided to organize this conference several years ago. This conference is primarily targeted towards academic institutions. As you know, as a UN agency, universities are not our traditional nor our main constituencies. However, let me emphasize that since 2010, universities and their research establishments can become members of ITU. This is quite unique among the UN family. I am pleased so say that today the academic membership includes over 160 institutions from more than 60 countries all over the world, and it is growing. [For comparison: we have more than 800 members from the industry]

ITU is reaching out to academia because we are convinced that we can make a bigger impact in our work by collaborating with universities and research institutes in many fields of ITU activities. And one of the most important fields is developing capacities and skills.

Therefore, the key objective of this meeting is to strengthen this collaboration between ITU and academic institutions in our shared efforts to developing digital competences, and to contribute towards the global goal of preparing a workforce that is fit for the digital future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have an exciting agenda in front of us and I am very happy about the impressive lineup of academic thought leaders in the field of digital technologies, from different parts of the world.

Some of the key questions we will address these coming days are the following:

- What does digital transformation mean and what is the role of academic institutions in shaping the future digital ecosystem?
- What are the sets of skills required in the new digital era and how are universities responding to these?
- How are academic institutions digitally transformed and what are the challenges they are facing in this process?
- What are some of the new academic programmes and changes in the curriculum to better prepare 21st century students, including in the fields of AI and digital health?
- How can academia-industry collaboration be strengthened to ensure that universities create a future workforce that is fit for purpose?

In the course of this meeting, we will show evidence of the benefits of building partnerships in the area of capacity development between academic institutions, industry and ITU. I have no doubt that we can strengthen our collaboration by tapping into each other's core competencies. I encourage you to reflect on these issues and share your ideas on how we can work together towards this common goal.

With this, I thank you for coming and wish you fruitful discussions over the next couple of days.

Thank you.