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WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY FORUM
PRESS CONFERENCE
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
9 APRIL 2019
1130 CET

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>> MONIKA GEHNER:  Hello, ladies and gentlemen.  We are still waiting for the Secretary-General so I would ask you to please bear with me for another three minutes.  And then we will start because we have already not that much time left.  Thank you.

So good morning.  Thank you for coming.  Also our colleagues from the UN Palais and Boris, amongst others, as the regular press briefing at the UN Tuesdays and Fridays has just finished, so I appreciate that you took time to come here.  We have 20, 30 minutes for this press briefing.

My name is MONIKA GEHNER.  I am the head of Corporate Communication at ITU.  We are pleased to welcome you here today after the opening of the WSIS forum, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, a very special year.  Until Friday, 12th April, we will still have sessions going on.  We had use and accessibility yesterday but there are many other exciting events.  All in all, about 250 sessions, and what is special about that is they are crowd sourced, so following an open consultation process, civil society, individuals, governments can submit topics to make this platform the United Nations' largest for multistakeholder dialogue and exchange of good practices, experiences and innovation.

So, very special.  It also means that this is actually what's on people's mind right now, what is on the policy dialogue in terms of ICTs for good.  This conference is about ICTs for development to help advance the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, all 17, and the sessions here are aligned with the SDGs along eleven action lines, and today we will announce winners that have submitted projects in these categories, projects that help advance

the SDGs.  So that ceremony will be at around lunch time, and we will have a press release this afternoon with the link to the winners, the 18 winners.

We also can say that it's an exceptional year as the awards are growing in popularity; the prizes that I just mentioned are coming out of 1062 projects that have been submitted and nominated compared to 492 last year.  That's a tremendous increase, and it shows the popularity, the interest in ICTs for development and what's going on around the world.

And more than 2 million people have actually voted on these projects, which is almost twice as many as last year.  So the popularity is growing year on year for this contest.  So today we have the journalists from the UN, from Geneva, analysts, editors, journalists and I welcome you.  We have two speakers today.  We have the just confirmed Chairman of the WSIS Forum, Minister of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Mr. Mustafa Jabbar.  Welcome.  And Mr. Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General of ITU.  So following short remarks of each speaker, and I would give the floor first to Mr. Mustafa Jabbar, we will do a round of questions here from the room.  So please, Mr. Mustafa Jabbar.  The floor is yours.

>> MUSTAFA JABBAR:  Thank you very much.  Ladies and gentlemen, this is definitely a great opportunity for me personally and also as the Chairman of WSIS.  WSIS has become a definite platform for the whole world to move forward in a digital era.  In fact, for me, it is something which was giving me a direction towards what is going to happen in the future.  I followed the 2003 WSIS Conference in Geneva, and I remember the action lines which were directed to transform the world into an Information Society.

As you know, we, the human civilization has passed through the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution and now we are in the information age, and thanks to WSIS that in 2003 it was really difficult to just foresee what is going to happen to the industry.  And WSIS could recognize that that is going to be Information Society, and as a person from a least developed country, we are just focusing on what we should be doing when we have missed the industrial revolution, what's the rest of the world which are not civilized what should be there target, what should be there Action Plans and it is to be realized.

So today in the tenth year of WSIS Forum, we are proud to say that WSIS has become the Forum for U.N. organization, but along with the public and private sector, and the direction WSIS is setting, and the process for taking the decisions, I think this is one of the best ways.  As you know, as we have mentioned there are sessions going on, there are dialogues going on, and large participants are here.  The speakers are here.

So we will be getting our summaries from these sessions.  We will be having the action plans and we, definitely will be able to find out what we will have to do in near future.  As you know, the world is now discussing about the industrial revolution 4.0.  We are calling it IR4.0.  Somebody is calling it digital revolution.  Japan is terming as 5.0, so it is definitely an important issue that what the world should be doing and WSIS has become a platform to set the direction, okay, the world can move this way.

I would like to mention here again that the world is not flat.  It is not the same theory that applies to every country or every society.  It has to be individually tailored, it has to be customized, and the implementation stage has to be different.  I can simply say one thing: that the future technologies coming up, this might be something very good for some of the countries or some of the nations, but might be very much challenging for some of the countries to adopt

the technology, to just face the challenges.

It will definitely facilitate the human life.  It will definitely create a new society, but the human being will have to face the challenges of it.  I welcome all of you and thank you very much for attending this press conference.  I hope at the end of the WSIS our world will definitely get something very good and something very new.  Thank you very much.

(Applause).

>> MONIKA GEHNER:  Thank you, Mr. Jabbar.  I hand over to Mr. Houlin Zhao.

>> HOULIN ZHAO:  Thank you very much.  To join our press conference.  I think some of you I also met you annually, at last year, year before, we had our press conference in this room, and you were here.  So we appreciate very much your continued support to this WSIS Forum activities.

>> AUDIENCE:  Could you cover how much you have improved in French? I was quite astonished.

>> HOULIN ZHAO:  Yes, we don't have interpretation here.  I don't know whether that is my French.  And last year, definitely, is not here our Chairman.  This year we get our Chairman here, and Bangladesh is a country, as I mentioned in my opening introductions to our Chairman, is one of the largest populated country in the world.  They have a lot of challenges to connect the people online, a lot of initiative for a lot of projects, but one of the projects I appreciate very much when I visited Bangladesh in 2007, 12 years ago, that is the project called Info Lady.  I was really impressed about the project because this Info Lady is a project the government launched to invite the girls in the villages to be trained with different skills and to cover, for example, agriculture, everything, you see that the villages have to face daily life and to try to get some assistance or support from professionals or from the government.

So what did they do?  The Government invited the girls to be trained, offered them small credit to allow them to use this credit to buy bicycles and these girls would have to offer their services to the villages and houses.  And then also, for example, you don't have hospital in the village.  The girls will go to the families to first test, then send data by computer to someone and then for agriculture they can also provide the first basic information to the villages and to tell them what, you know, that Professor or the specialist could offer advice to them.  It's great.

Now, these girls were not necessarily continued by the Government.  The girls have to offer their services to villages to get their salaries, and when I was there, I said how much do they want, and they told me in front of the girls some of them want much better than I do, because the charges are very limited, but then you have more services, you get more income.

So that is something that I was really impressed and I promoted that example almost everywhere I could promote it.  And yesterday when I met His Excellency, minister, and he told me that this is not a pilot anymore.  This is, it's a program that everywhere in the country.  So 12 years later, this pilot becomes the real program to assist the villages with this kind of assistance from the ladies and from the girls.  So that is, so I believe, has not to share with us, so I was pleased to have His Excellency, Minister, despite his heavy schedule, promised to help us to Chair the sessions during this week, and, of course, I believe during this week a lot of contact will be managed between our stakeholders, between our members, with our minister and the minister could also guide us at the end of this Forum to see from his point of view what WSIS Forum could help us, and what the WSIS Forum could do for us for the next decade because we still have at least ten years to go, and then according to United Nations process in 2015 they

agreed to extend this WSIS Forum for at least another ten years up to 2025.

Of course, we also have the SDGs until 2030. So I believe this WSIS Forum activities will be appreciated by our membership, by our partners, by stakeholders. So that, Excellency, your guidance at the end of this process as we are greatly committed to the whole process of WSIS through the UN process. Of course, my friends if you have any questions we would be pleased to answer but I would encourage you to ask more questions to our Chairman, because you cannot miss me, you have me today and you still have chance next week. Thank you.

>> MONIKA GEHNER: Okay. Who would like to go first? Please.

>> AUDIENCE: Hi, Nina Larson. I was wondering if you could pinpoint some of the ethical issues that are being raised here and that you think are the main ethical challenges when it comes to AI and implementation of AI for industries or if you could pinpoint some of that discussion, please.

>> MUSTAFA JABBAR: As I have mentioned from the introductory speech, the world is becoming definitely a different place because with the technologies, particularly you have mentioned AI, the question of privacy, the question of data security, question of individual securities, all of these will be a very critical thing, and I believe this is a challenge not only for one mission. This will be a global situation and we will have to address that part. As you have mentioned about the ethics part, now from a perspective of a developing country, what we see is that the challenges are so big that when we become more digitized, the challenge becomes more.

So the security issue becomes more, the ethical issues become more, and the situation is absolutely different in different countries. Say, for instance, let me give you an example of Facebook, social media content. Somebody can just express anything they want in Facebook. But what we face is then Facebook has a community standard. That is a U.S. company, they are governed by the U.S. laws, but the community standard in Bangladesh or community standard in India or community standard in African countries are not as same as the U.S.

So when we place a request to Facebook, they just look at the community standard they have for the U.S., but they don't deal with the Bangladesh issue. And these are the same things, the issues are not the same all over the world. So I think what finally I have discussed with Facebook in the last Mobile Congress, we have to look at the country itself in a separate manner. We will have to abide by the laws of the countries and definitely will have to look at the particular situation of that country.

What I feel is, as this issue also has to be addressed just locally and it has to be customized. There will be different policies. There will be different laws and customs, and in this digital age, we don't have any other options but to customize that part. It's not the same flat platform for everybody for everything. That's the real thing that we have to address, and from WSIS, because this is not representing particular Developed Countries or industrialized countries, WSIS is definitely, so WSIS will have to look at that part and one of the roles for WSIS can be what can be done on the ethical issues for the whole world. That's very important that we develop those policies and those policies should be customized for particular countries, particular societies all over the world.

>> HOULIN ZHAO: Let me add one point, Excellency. You are talking about AI and ITU organized two times AI for Good Summit, first event was organized in 2017. That was initiated by American AI experts. And the way they came to ITU, the reason why they come to ITU, they

said they would like to have cooperation with the UN agencies. So they chose ITU. And I think that's clearly demonstrative that ethics is quite important for the resources. And when we come to the debate, ethics is one of the topics to be focused, and consequently they talk about regulations because industry likes to have development in good environment, and then to have a good environment you need some regulations, whether it's good, bad, heavy or light, that is another story, but they need these kinds of things.

And then this is a hot topic, that is the reason why the UN agencies also consider this quite important. The first AI for Good Summit we got about 22 agencies join us and last year, 2018 we got 31 UN agencies and this ethics topic is also higher up on the agenda, and His Excellency mentioned some of those aspects. I just wanted to add, point to that our industry also considered this quite important so that they can, and then from internally, I always highlight the importance that industry come to UN and we should not take this opportunity to try to hurry up to make such rules and establish regulations at this early time.

Maybe we have to continue to work with our industry to see how we help the AI business become a business. I just wanted to add that point, yes.

>> MONIKA GEHNER: Thank you very much. I may just mention that the AI for Good Global Summit takes place from 28 to 31st of May here in Geneva. Another question, yes, please.

>> AUDIENCE: Yesterday we had a very heavy session on accessibility. So I'm curious about Bangla publishing system, the one you developed. Is that a software that can recognize Bangla and translate it to Braille? And how many schools for the blind do you have in Bangladesh and if you also have books in Bangla Braille, like a Braille library?

>> MUSTAFA JABBAR: Thank you very much. In fact, this is a personalized question, and definitely I started the process of writing Bangla in computer since 1987 that on May 16, I published the first Bangla newspaper using a computer because back then the computer had only Roman characters, nothing else. So first of all, I started the process of writing Bangla, and subsequently realized that the important issue is whether we can have Bangla publications.

So what I did is a software we developed that the text in Bangla can be converted to Braille text, and that can be printed to paper, particularly we had the problem of Braille books. There have been no Braille books available, and it was really difficult to just type in Braille and then publish it.

So that automated the whole system and now you will find millions of books being printed by my software transforming the textbooks and all other books from the Bangla to Braille. What good news we are having is that my ministry has taken a project for developing software for the blind people, for the differently disabled people including Screen Reader and also from text to speech, speech to text, on all other technologies that can be available for the not only blind, for all of the disabled people.

So the project is going on, and I feel that by one year time frame, so maybe even every two, there is something for normal communications also. What I feel is that the one started with English, but it's not going to remain that. The world is going to be native English world, and the mission translation is doing that part. So maybe I will be talking in Bangla and you will understand in French.

So this will happen to all of the native languages by the use of Artificial Intelligence and language. You will be able to convert your language to be an international language. So that's

going to happen. We are implementing a project. I think after we finish the project, we have 16 fields being developed for the native Bangla languages and let's hope for the best.

>> AUDIENCE: Thank you very much. That also underlines an important message that infrastructure is not enough. We need the skills and we need local language, content, and content relevant to local context to really reach the other half of the world giving access to ICTs. Boris Angelson, please, it's your floor.

>> AUDIENCE: Yes, I'm just a local freelancer. One question to each of the honorable Mustafa Jabbar and to the Secretary-General Houlin Zhao, the first question to Secretary-General. Your colleague, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has appointed someone as coordinator for all Internet things, Mr. Kumbaya I think, so it makes confusion between the WSIS, the coordination with Mr. Kumbaya, the Internet Governance Forum… It is not necessarily a bad thing that the several agencies or departments, but how do they reposition themselves with the other one when a new player comes into the game.

>> MONIKA GEHNER: This is the last question for Mr. Houlin Zhao, I'm sorry, because he has to leave after that, but would you like to answer?

>> HOULIN ZHAO: Yes, thank you very much for this question, and indeed Secretary-General of UN last year appointed high level experts to look at this issue of ICT related development. And as you point out, we have WSIS process here and ITU has its own program, and you heard from many UN agencies this morning that they have their own program initiative as well.

So the Secretary-General would like to have some kind of general views about where we are and how can these programmes be coordinated, harmonized. So the point of this group. This group already has some meetings, physical meetings, and in January before I went to -- I invited the group to have lunch with me in ITU, and I also talked to Secretary-General several times. Secretary-General highlighted the fact that this group is targeted to have report delivered to him very soon in May and not in time to keep this group as a permanent group.

This is a group of high level experts that come together to look at the ICT rules to facilitate the social and economic development, in particular through the UN process. So that is the my understanding, and I talked to a group coordinator Ambassador, and then I asked him if he is very busy with his group to set up some kind, of for the report and you can ask a question to him as well. So at the meeting which will be held in Geneva in May, we will have a chance to discuss this issue again, but in my opinion, it doesn't matter what kind of possible answer we might have. There is one thing very to me that the WSIS process will be continued, that there is not any plan to terminate this process or run far away from this process.

So that is confirmed by the members of this group at lunch and also I did not hear anything from the Secretary-General to have another mechanism to request the WSIS Forum. That is what I could share this morning. Of course, I have to go for the prize.

>> No problem. I will take care of it.

>> HOULIN ZHAO: I see you later at the luncheon.

>> MONIKA GEHNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Houlin Zhao. Do we have other questions in the room? Another question, shall we finish this one, because if you would like to go, and we had already two stories that are quite interesting, Bri and the first story, so the award winners will tell you many more stories. So please.

>> AUDIENCE: So Mr. Jabbar, you yourself mentioned that each country has specificity

and that Internet issues, high tech issues should be analyzed taking into account the specificity. Bangladesh has a lot of specificities both at the high tech user and provider, so what are the specific benefits so far your Government, your ministry could develop since you have specific issue? Bangladesh is a large country in terms of population, it has specific issues of governance, of education, of planning, of environment, so what are your priorities, your specific success stories or project which make Bangladesh a special country, and so far Bangladesh has been a subcontractor for the textile industry, but it has all of the novel to become a major supplier in terms of high tech, so will that be the next bang lower?

>> MUSTAFA JABBAR:  Thank you very much.  If I have to answer your question, it will take hours.  I don't have much of time, I have to go to the prize winning ceremony and I can simply say one thing, one important issue for the new technology is that the global situation is something that every nation has some common benefit from the technology, and some common challenges from the technology.

So let's think of something about the challenges.  I define that digital security is the challenge for the whole world, and it cannot be solved by a single country, and it has to be a global cooperation, because say, for instance, I can mention one of the stories which has been published.  The money from our Bangladesh bank, the central bank has been stolen.  The money was kept in the U.S., and the hacker was even not in the U.S. or Asian sub-continent.  Somebody stole it and sent it to Philippines.

So that's the scenario which is going to happen in the digital world.  So every nation will have to cooperate with each other to maintain global security on digital age.  For Bangladesh it has become in fact the real success story of least developed country because in 2008 we did have nothing.  I can just simply mention two, three, four things like the digitalization has empowered our people to have Government right sitting at his home.

And there are more than 200 services which are available at his fingertips just with the Smart Phone or normal feature phone they have.  We have the digital, we have digital post offices which has not only been able to transfer services, we transfer more than 1024, that means 1,400 Taka transferring money through mobile phones.  So if you look at the healthcare, the benefit is going through digitization, and as Houlin Zhao has mentioned already, we could just benefit the farmers, and it's going to happen more because the circumstances is coming up with I2 technologies which will be -- IT technologies -- which will be helping the farmers to determine when further water needs to be given, the fiscal division will be different because they will be able to calculate the need of food when it is necessary, how much it is necessary, and the lifestyle has changed.  One of the major areas we are working in is education.

What I feel is that we were currently for hundreds of years, and the education system we are having is definitely colonial today.  This education system doesn't give us the skill for the digital age.  So we have to transform the present education system to a digital one.  We have started converting our normal school to digital school.  We have started converting the syllabus and the evaluation system to digital.

So these are the things that are happening.  And you will be definitely happy to know that Bangladesh declared as digital Bangladesh to be completed by 2021.  It's the 50th year and being declare in 2009 and India declared it in 2014.  So we realize that we could understand that we have missed the industrial revolution.  We have to leapfrog and we are doing that.

>> MONIKA GEHNER:  Thank you very much.  So this brings us to the end of the press

briefing.  I wish you a good WSIS afternoon and please join the WSIS award ceremony, which is taking place in room 1.  Thank you very much.  Thank you very much, Excellency.  (Adjourned at 1212 CET)

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