1. What are the most important **achievements** arising from WSIS that should be highlighted in the Zero Draft? *

The most important achievement of the WSIS has been to advance connectivity and help enable two thirds of the world population to access the benefits offered by the Internet. This achievement is due to the multi-stakeholder model of governance, which has enabled the Internet and Internet-based technologies to develop and expand so successfully over the past twenty years and driven digital transformation across the world. It is critical that WSIS continues to address the digital divide as 2.6 billion people are still offline.

The multi-stakeholder approach has fostered dynamic partnership and collaboration between governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community and international organisations. It has supported new services and applications which are benefitting people around the world. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) has become an essential platform for discussing policy issues and for promoting capacity building by sharing best practice and knowledge. The WSIS Forum has fostered partnerships and coordinated action with UN Action Line facilitators.

A key achievement of the WSIS has been to keep up to date with the fast pace of technological development, addressing new opportunities and challenges as they emerge. This is only possible because the WSIS Action Lines are technology neutral. The Action Lines provide an enduring framework to address the opportunities and challenges of information and communication technologies and it is important that they remain technology neutral.

2. What are the most important **challenges** to the achievement of WSIS outcomes to date and in the future that need to be addressed in the Zero Draft? *

Meaningful connectivity remains the biggest and most fundamental challenge and it is a critical enabler of digital transformation. Connecting the final third of people who are still offline will require sustained multi-stakeholder commitment and strengthening of the multi-stakeholder model. That requires increased focus on building an enabling environment for investment and looking at innovative solutions such as community networks, public-private partnerships, the effective use of universal service funds, enabling regulation and licensing frameworks, the efficient and dynamic use of radio spectrum and promoting multilingualism. Ensuring access is affordable, inclusive, sustainable and meaningful will require a coordinated multistakeholder effort. The work of ITU on last-mile connectivity and other key factors of digital inclusion should be recognised.

The gender digital divide remains a significant cross-cutting challenge and we would like to see a specific section on this in the zero draft. This challenge needs to be addressed holistically and specifically. It would be helpful for the zero draft to recognise the contributions of different stakeholders to bridging the gender digital divide and to recognise the role that UN Women can play here.

The protection and promotion of human rights is a critically important challenge and the zero draft should explicitly acknowledge this with references to international human rights law and standards. The zero draft should acknowledge the role of UN OHCHR in this regard. Similarly, the zero draft should reflect the commitment made in the GDC for Member States to refrain from Internet shutdowns and measures that target Internet access.

The protection of journalists and media workers and human rights defenders is another critical challenge cutting across a range of Action Lines and should be properly addressed. The International Federation of Journalists reports that 122 journalists were killed in 2024 and the WSIS should not be silent on this issue. The zero draft should build on the commitment in the Global Digital Compact to promote diverse and resilient information ecosystems, including by strengthening independent and public media and supporting journalists and media workers.

The environmental impact of information and communications technology is an increasing challenge and we welcome the attention given to this in the Elements Paper. We hope that the zero draft reflects commitments made in the Global Digital Compact to leverage digital technologies for sustainability while minimising their negative environmental impacts.

Finally, the risk of duplication and fragmentation of efforts across the UN system is a challenge, particularly during a time of financial constraints. We note that in the 2025 WSIS Resolution, Member States at the CSTD recognised "the importance of integrating the implementation of the Global Digital Compact commitments into the WSIS architecture in order to avoid duplications and ensure a cohesive and consistent approach to digital cooperation". We fully support that and hope that the zero draft will reflect this agreement. We hope the zero draft will call for a strengthened role for the UN Group on the Information Society to help promote coordination of efforts.

3. What are the most important **priorities** for action to achieve the WSIS vision of a 'people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society' in the future, taking into account emerging trends? *

The most important priority must continue to be expanding meaningful connectivity, with a focus on underserved communities and marginalised groups, and using information and communication technologies to promote digital transformation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We support the idea to ask each UN Action Line facilitator to develop a Road Map for their Action Lines which would set out concrete plans for the coming period and ensure the Action Lines, the Sustainable Development Goals and the relevant initiatives of the Global Digital Compact are properly joined up.

The WSIS review should recognise and not duplicate existing initiatives across the UN system. There are many UN agencies doing digital capacity building work, not only Action Line facilitators. There are many examples of valuable projects and initiatives that should be recognised and supported. These should be taken fully into account in the Action Line Roadmaps in order to support efforts to strengthen coordination and increase impact.

To promote meaningful connectivity the WSIS review should expand on the actions necessary to build an enabling environment for investment. We would like the zero draft discuss best practice, for example in terms of market competition, independent and predictable regulation and proportionate taxation and licensing fees. It should be a priority to create a conducive investment and business environment for those ICT companies and business models that can sustainably push the market frontier and serve the underserved to close the digital gap.

We would like to see more formal roles in the WSIS process for the UN OHCHR to support joined up and effective action on human rights and for UN Women to support work tackling the gender digital divide.

A key action for the WSIS review should be to give the IGF an ongoing mandate, without a time limit, to give it a predictable and durable basis on which to grow, evolve and respond to new and emerging opportunities and challenges. The review should also formally recognise the crucial role of national and regional IGFs. These provide an inclusive platform for communities and stakeholders at the local and regional level and they promote integration between global frameworks and local implementation. They should be given a more formal role in the annual IGF in order to promote inclusion and representation. We also hope that the IGF Leadership Panel will be strengthened.

Finally, it is clear that AI and data governance are important and high-profile topics at the moment which require attention. However, there is currently a crowded landscape of global governance of AI in particular. We believe it would be inefficient and unproductive to revisit these issues when there is ongoing work under the GDC and those GDC agreements are still being implemented. The WSIS review could note the work of the CSTD Working Group on Data Governance and the AI Scientific Panel and Global Dialogue, but it should not make new proposals while those initiatives are still being implemented.

4. What **additional themes/issues**, if any, should be included in the Elements Paper? *

The zero draft should acknowledge the agreements reached less than a year ago in the GDC. The UK fully supports this document, which was negotiated over a long period of time and reached important agreements on topics such as Internet governance, human rights, AI, data governance and other issues. We should not try to negotiate this language again, but instead should use it as a source of consensus agreement that will allow us to look forward, rather than re-negotiate previous agreements.

The zero draft should also emphasise the multi-stakeholder approach more clearly and consistently as the essential foundation of the WSIS process since its beginning. In order to build legitimacy, support and "real world" impact, the draft should reflect throughout the roles and contributions of the private sector, civil society, the technical community and others and the need for cooperation and partnership between governments, international organisations and other stakeholders.

Fully embedding human rights principles in the WSIS processes is essential. Stronger human rights language should therefore be integrated throughout, and be clearly grounded in international human rights law, including explicit reference to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As well as agreed language from the GDC, it should include agreed language from relevant Human Rights Council and UNGA resolutions. Issues such as the role of platforms, disinformation and hate speech should be addressed from the basis of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which has been endorsed by the Human Rights Council. These include rigorous and clear responsibilities on business enterprises to avoid causing adverse human rights impacts and to address such impacts when they occur.

Finally, the zero draft should call for the initiatives coming from the GDC to be integrated into the WSIS process, in line with the agreements made by Member States of CSTD. And, as mentioned above, connectivity, an enabling environment for investment, human rights, the gender digital divide and the role of national and regional IGFs should also be included with greater depth and focus.

5. Do you wish to comment on **particular themes/issues/paragraphs** in the Elements Paper?   *

We would like the zero draft to use language that was recently agreed on the principles set out in the GDC, for example on Internet governance, data, AI and the ethical dimensions of the Information society. For example the GDC says that "Internet governance must continue to be global and multi-stakeholder in nature" (para 27) and that "we consider that international governance of artificial intelligence requires an agile, multidisciplinary and adaptable multi-stakeholder approach" (para 54). The language of the Elements Paper does not properly reflect this multi-stakeholder approach. The language around AI is not balanced and does not represent the role of the UN in line with the GDC.

The zero draft should not have a specific section on "enhanced cooperation". We recognise that this concept is included in the Tunis Agenda, but despite two CSTD Working Groups on this issue, there is still no consensus about what it means. Choosing to re-open failed discussions from the past will only take us backwards and even risk the success of the review process. We should park this discussion and instead develop new language around the need to promote greater inclusion and representation in policy-making.

The section on human rights is not adequately anchored in international human rights law. In particular we would like to see specific reference to:

- the commitment set out in the Geneva Declaration and the Tunis Commitment to the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms
- article 19 of the ICCPR, in which it is enshrined that everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference, and the right to freedom of expression including to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, which is essential to the WSIS agenda
- the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, as mentioned above
- the damage done by Internet shutdowns
- issues such as the protection of journalists, media workers and civil society
- the need to respect independence of media.

Paragraph 48 of the Elements Paper should be reframed to emphasise clearly the conditions under which restrictions are allowed, with explicit reference to Article 19(3) of the ICCPR and the principles of "lawful, necessary, proportionate". As currently drafted it does not give proper emphasis to those conditions and it contains vague language such as "relevant" and "established in law". We would propose text such as "restrictions on the right to freedom of expression are only permissible when lawful, necessary, proportionate, and in full compliance with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights".

Finally, the section on building confidence and security in the use of ICTs should recognise the challenges faced by some countries, particularly developing countries, and renew focus on capacity building, skills and work to strengthen cyber resilience. The WSIS review is not the right place to address issues such as cyber crime and state behaviour in cyber space. Instead there is a very broad agenda about capacity building, based on the work of the ITU (as the sole Action Line facilitator) and other multi-stakeholder initiatives by organisations such as the Internet Society and the Global Cybersecurity Alliance. This section should also reaffirm that building confidence and security in the use of ICTs should be consistent with human rights.

6. What suggestions do you have to support the development of the **WSIS framework** (WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, UNGIS etc.)? *

We would like to see a greater role for national and regional IGFs, as mentioned above. The WSIS review is an opportunity to recognise their work and the important role they play promoting inclusion and more globally representative voices. We would like to see National and Regional Initiatives play a greater role in the annual IGF and would encourage governments and other stakeholders to support and engage with them as platforms for national and regional engagement.

We would like to see an ongoing mandate for the IGF, without time limitation. Steps should be taken to strengthen the finances and the capacity of the IGF. The IGF should remain an open, bottom-up, multi-stakeholder platform but more can be done to develop a clearer agenda and more inclusion. We support the work of the IGF Leadership Panel. We believe the MAG could be reformed to ensure more effective and focused decision-making.

The WSIS Forum should continue as an open, multi-stakeholder forum for discussion and sharing best practices on the WSIS Action Lines. We would like to see the UN Group on the Information Society play a stronger role in promoting coordination across the UN system. As mentioned, UN OHCHR and UN Women should be invited to play a more formal role in the WSIS process.

As mentioned, we also support the idea of developing Roadmaps for each of the WSIS Action Lines, bringing together work across the UN system and aligning the WSIS Action Lines with the SDGs and the initiatives coming out of the GDC.

7. Do you have any **other** comments? *

We would re-iterate again our strong view that the WSIS review should draw on the language of the GDC and the commitments made in the GDC. This was agreed less than a year ago and provides a strong basis of consensus that will allow us to move forward constructively on shared priorities.

8. Who is **submitting** this input? *

Kindly provide the name of the person submitting this input, as well as the associated country, organization, stakeholder type, and relevant contact information

Paul Blaker, Head of ITU and Internet Governance, Department of Science, Innovation and Technology, United Kingdom government.

9. Please provide your **e-mail** address: *

Please enter an email