Dynamic Teen Coalition (DTC) Statement on the WSIS+20 Zero Draft Submitted to the United Nations Co-Facilitators of the WSIS+20 Review of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20)

Friday, 19 September 2025 GMT

Excellencies,

On behalf of the Dynamic Teen Coalition (DTC), we respectfully submit this note regarding the WSIS+20 Zero Draft. We commend the emphasis placed on children's digital rights and the recognition of youth participation. However, we must call attention to a persistent structural blind spot: **the exclusion of Teens (ages 13–19) from formal recognition and participation frameworks**.

The Blind Spot

The Zero Draft references children and youth, but the definitions underpinning these categories are inconsistent and, in practice, leave teens invisible. Globally, "youth" is variously defined as 15–24, 15–32, 13–30, or even up to 35. UN branches themselves differ in scope. Often, programs default to 18 as the entry point, or leave the category undefined altogether.

This definitional ambiguity has consequences:

- **Paragraph 78** reaffirms human rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but in practice it positions teens as either children needing protection or as adults presumed to be 18+, leaving them in governance limbo.
- **Paragraph 92** highlights the participation of women and girls as critical for equality, empowerment, and democracy, yet makes no parallel recognition for teens, despite their systematic exclusion.
- **Paragraph 93** acknowledges children and young people as Internet users but still frames participation through protection, not agency, effectively erasing teens as stakeholders.

The Risks

This oversight has real, systemic risks:

- It **conflates the teen years with childhood**, denying recognition as independent digital citizens.
- It **defaults participation to 18, or leaves it undefined**, excluding teens from youth programs, capacity-building, and governance.
- It **ignores legal and digital realities**: most jurisdictions set 13+ as the minimum age of digital consent, meaning teens are already active, daily digital participants.
- It reinforces structural exclusion at the very moment when **"teen bans"** on social media and digital platforms are spreading, compounding invisibility in governance with erasure from digital spaces themselves.
- It undermines the credibility of commitments to inclusivity, **leaving "no one behind"** in rhetoric while sidelining millions in practice.

Points to Consider

We respectfully urge that the WSIS+20 Outcome Document:

- **Explicitly recognize Teens (13–19) as a distinct group** within the multigenerational digital community, complementing references in Paragraphs 78, 92, and 93.
- **Adopt inclusive, lifelong multi-stakeholder frameworks such as [DTC's](#)**, balancing protection with empowerment, so that children, teens, youth, and adults each have clearly defined roles and supports.
- **Mandate UN and stakeholder programs to include teens in "youth" participation spaces**, with legal and ethical safeguards proportionate to age and context.
- **Affirm the principle of teen agency**, recognizing teens as contributors with rights and responsibilities, not only as subjects of protection.

Conclusion

Excellencies, WSIS+20 represents a historic opportunity to set a forward-looking, multigenerational standard for digital governance. **Recognition of teens is not a marginal detail, but a structural necessity.** By explicitly including teens in the Outcome Document, WSIS+20 can move beyond ambiguous or exclusionary age definitions and ensure inclusivity for all generations. Currently, the system restricts safe, timely, and meaningful teen participation, leaving them structurally excluded even when invited. By addressing this gap, WSIS+20 can establish the legal, ethical, and procedural safeguards necessary to make teen participation not only possible, but strategic, protected, and fully integrated into global governance—**ensuring that no generation is left behind in shaping the digital future**.