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**Keynote Address**

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**Expert Group Meeting  
In Preparation for the UN E-Government Survey 2022**

**29 March 2021 , 8:00 a.m.**

Distinguished Experts,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here with you today, as you begin discussions on preparation of United Nations E-Government Survey 2022.

As a major publication of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the E-Government Survey is widely recognised by digital ministers, national chief information officers, policymakers and researchers in public administration and in information and communication technology.

I wish to thank you for your expert contributions to this publication.

Digital transformation is a target of several Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Countries have embarked on pivoting and innovating to meet the challenges of sustainable development through digital government.

Today, with a cascade of global crises, digital government is more important than ever before.

From the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change and to rising inequalities, governments are seeking innovative solutions, including digital responses, to tackle these crises.

The growing use of digital technologies creates new opportunities for development.

But what does the future of digital government hold for us?

What are the key trends in digital technology that will shape governments and societies in the long term?

Are they going in the direction of sustainable development?

And will we be able to shape our future for more inclusive, accountable, responsive and resilient public institutions at all levels?

Or will we be forced to be led by technologies?

You will be addressing these and other questions during the next 3 days and we count on your expertise to help improve our work.

Without being exhaustive, let me highlight a few areas of concern that are important for enhancing digital government to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

[Number 1 is about Access to Internet.](#)

The Internet and digital technologies have shown agile capacity to support and advance our societies.

Yet, based on the 2020 UN e-Government Survey, the average E-Government Development Index for more than 50% of the countries in the world remain well below the global average.

One reason for this is poor and uneven accessibility of Internet in developing countries, especially the least developed countries.

According to ITU, half of the world population is offline or have issues on connectivity and accessibility.

In 2020, close to 87 per cent of individuals in developed countries used the Internet.....compared with only 19 per cent in the least developed countries.

Digital haves and have-nots are becoming critical determinants of people's prospect of livelihood and wellbeing.

Fulfilling our vision for leaving no one behind will require us to leave no one offline.

We need to ensure that every person has safe and affordable access to the Internet by 2030, including meaningful use of digitally enabled services.

You will be discussing these challenges during the third day of meeting.

The future of digital governments has an imperative to bridge the digital divides.

[This brings me to the second issue - Digital Commons - Redefining the Internet.](#)

But it is not merely the *access* to Internet that is crucial.

Many questions are raised as to how to define the internet as a common good, and how to improve its utility for everyone in the upcoming years.

The Internet should be considered as a global public good – a digital common.

The UN Secretary General’s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, issued in June 2020, highlights the importance of designing a fair and inclusive digital commons’ architecture.

If the benefits of increased Internet connectivity are to be realized, as the Roadmap suggests, it is important that all actors promote open data, open-source software, open AI models, open standards and open content as digital public goods.

[Let me elaborate on this – my 3<sup>rd</sup> point - Open Data and Managing Digital Risks.](#)

Openness increases efficiency, transparency, accountability and trust – the pillars of good governance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, personal and real-time data was necessary to effectively track and trace the spread of the virus.

The demand for open and reliable data is growing, but so is the demand for privacy and cybersecurity.

According to estimates, the potential cost of worldwide data breaches will be more than \$5 trillion by 2024.

There are legitimate concerns regarding the risks associated with handling and processing of data, particularly in light of the current fragmented regulatory landscape.

In the absence of a common set of principles based on human rights, data privacy, ethics and protection, people increasingly worry about data breaches and misuse of personal data for unjustified purposes.

Technology does not come risk-free and digital government should address privacy concerns and cybersecurity.

Governments and policymakers should abide by the principles of data minimization, limited data collection and retaining and sharing only necessary data.

In the foreseeable future these issues will become critical for digital government.

[My fourth point is about Connected and Seamless Government.](#)

The purpose of digital government is not and should not be digitization of existing bureaucracies or the use of new technologies for uncontrolled government surveillance.

The examples from digitally advanced societies show that the most innovative countries and cities take action to eliminate points of friction between governments and people they serve.

Making bureaucratic and sectoral boundaries permeable and bringing together different players of society to innovate and to control the processes - makes all the difference and builds trust and accountability.

Successful digital government shift from being ever-present in people's lives to becoming rather invisible while proactively offering automated services accessible anytime from anywhere at your convenience.

This approach helps to re-imagine the ways in which governments collaborate and interact with their constituencies.

In doing so, more governments are deploying cutting-edge technology to deliver public services.

The most effective strategies often rely on big data analytics and employ frontier technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, and blockchain to ensure effective outreach and provision of services.

As a result, the trend of adopting frontier technologies in government sector intensified -- signaling an irreversible shift towards digital transformation.

Technology and advancement of complex systems analysis, AI and big data also allow governments to build up anticipatory capabilities and actively shape future development scenarios.

The greater the efforts governments expend to imagine different plausible scenarios – the less they will find themselves perpetually *reacting* to crises.

Anticipatory government helps in responding to problems as they emerge.

In the future, we will likely see more anticipatory functions in digital government than we do now, allowing us to build better, inclusive and more resilient societies.

Distinguished experts,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

[This now brings me to the 5<sup>th</sup> and my last point - the way forward.](#)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains our blueprint for setting a course for a healthier and more resilient future in the post-COVID world.

In the past 20 years the United Nations E-Government Survey has become an invaluable asset providing longitudinal insights on digital public services.

It has become an important tool for countries to map and measure progress in digital government.

It is, thus, crucial to rely on rigorous and transparent methodologies to support Member States in their digitization journey.

UNDESA strives to do an even better job in this undertaking.

We rely on your expertise in improving our methodology in order to capture and address the main technological trends unfolding around us.

We hope your contributions will uncover new opportunities to further promote digital transformation and help UN Member States to come out of this crisis more resilient and people-centered.

I thank you for your attention.

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