

WSIS Forum 12-16 June, 2017

The concept of “information society” had developed in the early 2000s, and the UN General Assembly had agreed at the time, at ITU’s suggestion, that the world needed to come together and discuss how to make this information society truly inclusive. To fulfill this purpose WSIS was born. Held in 2003 and 2005, and attended by governments, private companies, and civil society organizations, WSIS came up with concrete suggestions for speeding up the evolution of the information society and bridging the digital divide. These suggestions were called action lines. They covered areas such as access to information, capacity building, security and trust in the use of ICTs, and cultural diversity. To follow up on the implementation of these action lines and other WSIS outcomes, the WSIS Forum came to life. The Forum has been held in Geneva since 2009 and is co-organized by the ITU, UNESCO, UNDP, and UNCTAD, in collaboration with many other UN entities. For an entire week each year, this ‘ICT for Development’ community comes together to look at how the world is progressing on its way to sustainable development, and what still needs to be done.

The WSIS Forum is thus an annual global multi-stakeholder platform whose main aim is to facilitate the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for advancing sustainable development. The Forum provides an opportunity for information exchange, knowledge creation and sharing of best practices, while identifying emerging trends and fostering partnerships, taking into account the evolving Information and Knowledge Societies. Following the UN General Assembly Resolution A/70/125, calling for close alignment of the WSIS and SDG process as well as holding the WSIS Forum on the annual basis, the WSIS Forum 2017 was held from the 12 – 16 June at the ITU Headquarters in Geneva and the overall theme of the WSIS Forum 2017 was “*WSIS Action Lines: Information and Knowledge Societies for SDGs*”.

This year the Forum attracted more than 2000 WSIS Stakeholders from more than 150 countries. Thousands followed remotely while more than 500 were engaged by intervening remotely. More than 500 high-level representatives of the wider WSIS Stakeholder community graced the Forum, with more than 85 ministers and deputies, several ambassadors, CEOs and Civil Society leaders contributing passionately towards the program of the Forum.

The WSIS Forum 2017 was chaired by H.E. Mr. Jean Philbert Nsengimana, Minister of Youth and ICT Rwanda, who played a key role in providing high-level guidance for the Forum's outcomes. The Agenda and Program of the WSIS Forum 2017 were designed in collaboration with the multi-stakeholders on the basis of official submissions received during the Open Consultation Process on the thematic aspects and innovations of the format of the WSIS Forum 2017. This process that began in September 2016 involved all WSIS Stakeholders (governments, civil society, private sector entities, academia and international organizations).

The 250+ sessions held throughout the week, centered on themes such as development, infrastructure, economic issues, socio-cultural issues, security, human rights, and legal issues. Amongst the notable achievements of this Session, was the launch of a new tool kit, *Bridging the Digital Innovation Divide*, which has been developed by ITU to help countries develop a Digital Innovation Framework, a set of policies and projects that foster national innovation; the launch of a campaign ‘Digital Skills for Decent Jobs Campaign’ by ILO and ITU to train 5 million young people globally by 2030; the launch of the Global E-waste Statistics Partnership to increase the availability and quality of e-waste data; and the launch of the Global ICT Regulatory Outlook 2017, the first of an annual series of reports tracking market and regulatory trends in the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector and their implications across the economy.