REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

**MINISTRY OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

“Distinguished Secretary-General, excellencies and delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

it is a great honor and privilege for me and my country, Slovenia, to chair this year’s Forum of the World Summit on the Information Society. Firstly, I would like to thank the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin, for her leadership, and for making this Forum an excellent platform for the exchange of knowledge, experience, and best practices. My thanks also go to the Forum’s coordinating team and the various international agencies that have collaborated to ensure the success of this Summit.

„May you live in interesting times,“ goes the old English saying. We certainly cannot complain in this regard as our times are indeed interesting when it comes to technological progress. It is here and now, on the cliff of a new era, that we are dealing with many different challenges of the latest industrial revolution. And it is on us to ensure humanity uses these vast new powers in a sustainable, fair, and wise way.

Almost daily we are witnessing a new scientific or technological breakthrough; the pace at which the world is changing is indeed unprecedented and both the individual and our society as a whole often struggle with keeping up. Digital technologies have transformed the way we communicate, learn, work, socialize, and do business. They have also empowered us to create new solutions to address some of the world's most pressing challenges. Yet not everyone has access to their potential and not everyone is equipped to using their power.

The fact is that the digital divide persists, and 2.7 billion people, particularly those in developing countries, still lack access to basic ICT infrastructure and services. Inequality in access to digital resources and skills can further increase existing social and economic disparities in the world.

Digital technologies need to be accessible to everyone regardless of their age, gender, location, or disability. It is crucial to ensure that everyone, including women and girls, has access to open, reliable, and secure Internet. I firmly believe that access to Internet should be a human right and that that right should be universally recognized; after all, it is called the „world-wide” web.

In addition, we need to ensure that everybody, including women and girls, is equipped with the necessary skills and competences, not only to use, but also create digital technologies. In cutting edge fields such as artificial intelligence, there are only 22% of women. The director general of the UN office in Geneva, earlier clearly presented us the consequences.

 We must not forget that as a society we are still standing on the shoulder of giants of the Age of Enlightenment and their motto „Dare to know!“. There is no digital transformation without the knowledge on how to use digital technologies. In fact, there is no future without knowledge – of that there should be no doubt.

Youth are the driving force of digital transformation. 75 % of young people worldwide use the Internet. Therefore, we should do our utmost to raise awareness and empower youth and children about online risks and prevent and counter cyberbullying and hate speech online. It should be our utmost priority to teach our children and grandchildren about all the implications of the vast power we will leave to them – and above all to prepare them for responsibilities that come with this power.

Lately, we have reached a point when new, emerging forms of artificial intelligence are forcing us to ask ourselves what it even means to be human – as caretakers of the future we should think long and hard about the answer.

Slovenia has been an active member of the International Telecommunication Union and the entire UN system; we are pleased to continue strong cooperation with all UN agencies. We wish to contribute to the greatest extent to encourage international cooperation in the development of telecommunication technologies and access to networks and services. Our focus lies on human-centric, human rights by design and “nothing about me without me” digital transformation while also taking steps to ensure that digital transformation is coupled with green and sustainable transition. We offer our expertise, while looking forward to the future exchange and learning from others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year’s Forum will serve as a platform to track the achievements of WSIS Action Lines and the SDGs.

I am confident that the discussions and outcomes of this Forum will contribute to shaping a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable digital future for all.

I encourage you to actively participate in the discussions, share your experiences and insights, and build new partnerships and collaborations.

I wish this Forum all the success.

Thank you.”