

adequate due diligence, enhanced risk management, efficient and resilient supply chains, greater connectivity throughout the market, upgraded operational and financial performance, increased market penetration, and venturing into new markets. Last but not least, digital investments can drive innovation forward at many otherwise struggling or undervalued companies. Ultimately, businesses are able to boost sales and revenues, which feeds into greater investment and employment. The whole economy – and society – benefits.

Special consideration should also be given to start-ups since they are playing an extremely important role in digital transformation. Despite the high-tech potential they carry, start-ups find it difficult to raise scale-up capital to fully capture the growing demand for their products and services after the first commercial launch. Here comes venture capital whose role in nurturing innovations cannot be overstated.

No one could have predicted the level of disruption and uncertainty that we have been up against for months now. To weather the storm and prepare for recovery, we have to prove more agile to anticipate things, and act faster, and more decisively. Most sectors have now passed the stage where being digitally advanced was simply a competitive advantage and it is now very often a matter of survival. We cannot afford to lose time. If there was ever a time to be responsive and actionable, then it is now. The lesson of past recessions is that fortune favours the bold who dare to turn a crisis into an opportunity to consolidate their market standing or even challenge the status quo.

## *6. How the IGF's current format aligns with the challenges ahead*

The IGF has evolved since it was first held in 2006. Over the years, it succeeded in becoming more open, bottom up, inclusive and collaborative. It has broadened stakeholder participation, with a view to empowering its participants to create informed and tangible solutions that benefit everyone. It has namely developed a supporting infrastructure of IGF's National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs) that add value both globally and in their own locations. Finally, it has launched intersessional activities that keep the dialogue going all year round and thus help achieve more substantive outcomes. The IGF is now better placed to constructively work with the ISOC-Internet Society (ensures that Internet remains open, accessible, trusted, and secure), the IANA-Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (responsible for the global coordination of the Domain Name System-DNS), and the ICANN-Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

(coordinates the system of unique names and numbers for an Internet secure, stable, and interoperable).

As the IGF evolved, a host of alternative and complementary forms of participation have emerged, surrounding the Main Focus Sessions. For example, Dynamic Coalitions are groups consisting of stakeholders involved in a particular issue but are not necessarily like-minded or have convergent interests. This format allows to take a thorough look into specific topical segments, such as Accessibility and Disability, Child Online Safety, or Freedom of the Media on the Internet. The Best Practices Fora are meant to build consensus around best practices that contribute to capacity building and can serve as guidance for future occurrences.

Dynamic Coalitions and Best Practices Fora work between annual sessions. So do the National and Regional IGF Initiatives, organic and independent formations established in around half of the countries of the world. There are currently more than 135 NRIs located in all five UN regions, in addition to several new ones, now forming and working to hold their first annual event in 2021/2022. To support the recommendations of the NRIs, the IGF hosts regular (bi)monthly virtual meetings where the NRI Coordinators share updates.

I often hear people from various milieus say ‘talking shop makes sense’. And there is so much truth about it. Formal conventions do not work for multistakeholder gatherings. Therefore, in addition to official discussions, a portion of time must be allocated for meetings within the working groups and on the sidelines. Too much of formalism stifles real debate (and progress!) in such fora. That was the idea behind Flash Sessions and Lighting Sessions, both of which are less formal versions of full-length workshops.

What I find extremely useful in terms of ensuring continuity and coherence of our debate is a custom, practiced since 2017, of issuing the consensus-driven IGF Messages at the end of the meeting. These provide an overview of the talks and highlight the crucial points raised, in particular with regard to actions and steps needed to be undertaken. Finally, the IGF agenda has also been extended to include high-level sessions, a parliamentary track, and last but not least, a youth track. All these changes are meant to make the IGF more diverse and more inclusive alike.

The parliamentary track was initiated during the IGF 2019 in Berlin and will be continued in Katowice. We want the debate with parliamentarians to be user-oriented. Preparatory talks are under way with the United Nations and the Interparliamentary Union, and the Sejm of the Republic of Poland whose Speaker was invited to chair the meeting.