REAPING THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

DENMARK'S RESPONSE TO THE UN HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON DIGITAL COOPERATION

SEPTEMBER 2019

The Government of Denmark welcomes the report of the UN High-level Panel (HLP) on Digital Cooperation: *The Age of Digital Interdependence*. Denmark commends the initiative taken by the UN Secretary General, acknowledging the importance of emerging technologies in the 21st century and the need for the international community to adapt.

Technology has become 'high politics' with an influence on global power balances. Countries are competing for mastering artificial intelligence. Digital infrastructure has become a foreign policy tool and is increasingly being used as leverage. And technological solutions has the potential to be misused to violate human rights and democratic processes.

Regardless of different opinions on the report's specific recommendations, the HLP report should be seen as the beginning – not the end – of the efforts to ensure a visionary, effective and fair approach to the digital agenda. Following our financial contribution and policy recommendations to the Panel, Denmark remains committed to cooperate with the Secretary General, the UN-system and other stakeholders to embrace the opportunities and mitigate the challenges of the technological revolution in the spirit of the HLP report.

Denmark strongly supports the emphasis throughout the report on using emerging technologies to achieve the SDG's. Technology should be a *means* for human progress and serve humanity – not vice-versa. Denmark agrees with the need to ensure affordable access to digital networks for all, and supports the promotion of digital equality and inclusion of women and marginalized groups in the digital economy and society. Furthermore, Denmark sees technological development as vital in the global efforts to combat climate change.

However, as the Panel underlines, technological solutions are not enough in themselves. Digitalization is cross-border in nature. We need to shape the trajectory of digital transformation jointly in a spirit of more, not less, international cooperation. A multistakeholder approach is essential to this end. Moreover, deepened multilateral cooperation is necessary at a point in time where technology emerges as a strong geopolitical factor and the rules-based international community is under pressure. We welcome the call, where necessary, for new institutional steps, while noting the importance of not undermining a number of crucial existing rules and norms in this process.

Denmark's position on the specific proposals of the HLP's report is based on our firm believe in the importance of preserving and promoting a free, secure and open internet as well as human rights and democracy in an increasingly digital 21st century.

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Expanding on the seven recommendations submitted by Denmark to the Panel in December 2018, Denmark would like to raise the following points:

1. Encouraging a balanced, human-centric approach to technology. Denmark is pleased with the basic narrative of a balanced approach to technology found in the report and supports a values-based approach that puts humans before technology. However, it is now crucial to convert good intentions and rhetoric into solutions that yields tangible results to citizens across the globe. Maintaining an optimistic view on technology while paying attention to evolving challenges and new risks is key to avoiding that the privacy scandals and the subsequent tech-lash will result in giving data 'a bad reputation' in the broader public. This at a time where the potential of data-driven decision-making for solving global challenges should be promoted. What is needed is real buy-in and practical solutions to the challenges that will inevitably come. This could be done by developing a select number of UN-led pilot-projects that could serve as catalysts for operationalizing the recommendations. Denmark stands ready to support, where possible, these efforts.

2. Promoting genuine participation and increased societal responsibility of the tech industry. Neither technology companies nor governments or international organizations can tackle the questions triggered by digital innovation alone. We need a structured dialogue with tech companies to make sure that democratic governments set the boundaries for the tech-industry. In spite of growing recognition of the need to bring the tech companies into the equation – including the Panel's recommendation about social media companies – a lot more has to be done. We need commitment from all sides and a readiness to engage. This demands a certain allocation of resources, but more importantly, a willingness to step out of our respective comfort zones and genuinely work together to find solutions. Governments and the industry have different roles to play. But without more preparedness from the global tech industry to take societal responsibility and contribute to the common good, we risk undermining the values and institutions which our societies are built upon. The current trend of too-little-too-late is not sustainable.

3. Combatting the digital divide and promoting digital solidarity. While Denmark is pleased with the focus on the SDG's, internet access for all, and human rights online, we could have wished for more tangible recommendations on how to ensure a stronger strategic focus on technology and innovation in development cooperation, humanitarian action, and within the UN system. This is crucial to combat a digital divide and ensure global solidarity. A rising number of internet users worldwide does not in itself guarantee equal access – in fact, we see signs of growing digital inequalities within and between countries and regions. Denmark agrees that 'Leaving No One Behind' in the context of digitalization must be viewed broader than only as a matter of connectivity. We need more investments in digital skills and infrastructure and a boost of capacity building on key governance aspects to make sure all groups, especially youth, women and girls, are equipped to harness the benefits of digitalization. Including enhancement and adaption of skills and education. Last, but not least, it will be key to find international solutions to ensure that all companies, including big tech companies, pay their fair share of taxes.

4. Getting regulation right. Denmark supports regulation that is 'adaptive, agile, inclusive and fit for purpose' as proposed by the Panel. In recent months, several of the largest tech companies have publicly welcomed more regulation on issues such as privacy. However, when policy makers lack sufficiently insight on how the platforms operate, it is very difficult to regulate in a smart and efficient way. There should be a mutual interest in avoiding over- or under-regulation and therefore in getting regulation right. The current information asymmetry is a gridlock that must

be overcome by more openness from the industry and a more proactive engagement by governments and institutions. Only then can we strike the right balance of promoting innovation versus ensuring fairness. We thus need increased transparency and information sharing from the industry to be able to regulate efficiently.

5. Safeguarding democracy & human rights. Denmark strongly agrees with the Panel that human rights 'apply fully in the digital world'. A potential review of human rights and new technologies should be conducted by experts in the Human Rights Council and the OHCHR. Important work in this area is already underway spanning both the normative and the practical levels. Together with a core group of countries, Denmark has taken specific steps to elevate human rights and new and emerging digital technologies on the HRC agenda. We believe there is a need for a holistic assessment of how digital developments will impact human rights. Denmark actively supports the OHCHR's direct dialogue with the tech-industry to enhance the understanding of human rights frameworks, including the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. We must ensure respect for human rights in the design, development and deployment of AI. Another important strand of work is the development of ethical standards for the use of data and guidelines for Artificial Intelligence in businesses that secures trust and enables innovation in the digital economy.

6. Advancing digital transformation through public sector digitalization. Denmark finds that the report lacks recommendations addressing public sector digitalization adequately. Public sector digitalization can increase effectiveness, improve quality of service delivery and ensure inclusive societal change in the digital age. The UN system could benefit from increased digitalization, e.g. by developing data-driven programming systems. This should be a central aim of the reform process, and could enhance efficiency and thus better use of financial contributions. Denmark agrees that capacity building is required and would like to see further clarification of the idea of a platform for sharing digital public goods. On the other hand, Denmark is unsure of the added value of the regional and global help desks and would prefer a more strategic and pro-active effort.

7. Emphasizing that the digital age requires more, not less, international cooperation. The report has a number of proposals with the potential to strengthen international and multistakeholder cooperation. Denmark believes that multistakeholder cooperation is crucial to ensure that everyone benefits from technological development. We fully support a strengthening of the IGF through more effective multistakeholder cooperation and that the IGF continues as a non-decision-maker forum, as well as the appointment of a UN Tech Envoy. Denmark stands ready to share lessons learned from the TechPlomacy-initiative and the mandate of Denmark's Tech Ambassador. We support the proposal to mark the UN's 75th anniversary with a 'Global Commitment for Digital Cooperation' to enshrine shared values, principles and understandings. We find it crucial that any new initiatives do not backtrack on existing results or overlap with existing mechanisms and processes, including in the cyber security area. We are therefore not yet convinced of the need for a 'Global Commitment on Digital Trust and Security'.

Faced with the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, Denmark remains committed to a rules-based international order based on human rights and democratic values. The UN is a corner stone ensuring global cooperation, and it is both timely and necessary that the UN steps deliberately into the front and centre of the technology-driven future with a strategic approach and a pro-active mind-set. Denmark stands side-by-side with the UN in this new, digital world order.