RECOMMENDATIONS FROM DENMARK TO
THE UN HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON DIGITAL COOPERATION
DECEMBER 2018

The Government of Denmark fully supports the UN Secretary-General's decision to establish the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation and is committed to cooperate with the Panel and contribute actively to this process.

On 9 November 2018, Denmark announced a financial contribution to the Panel of DKK 2 Million to enable consultations and enhance awareness.

With a view to the Panel's mission to present recommendations for effective and inclusive systems of digital cooperation, Denmark would like to highlight a number of key aspects, which we believe will be crucial for the Panel to include in its ongoing deliberations and in the final recommendations.

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1. ENCOURAGE A BALANCED, HUMAN-CENTRIC APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY

The global debate around technology is often portrayed in overly optimistic or overly pessimistic terms. There is no doubt that digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) will affect virtually all sectors of society: Digital transformation holds immense potential for breakthroughs in areas such as health care, science, agriculture, education and transportation, and for driving sustainable economic development and entrepreneurship. It is key for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. We cannot, however, be blindsided by technology's inherent risks and challenges. While digitalization could serve as an equalizer, it could also exacerbate inequalities, undermine fundamental rights, and erode public trust in our democratic institutions. Automation will affect labor markets in ways we cannot fully predict, and digital business models are challenging our traditional taxation models, which constitute the backbone of our welfare society. And the global financial sector is challenged by stateless currencies and distributed ledger technology. The potential impact on social stability and governments' ability to deliver public services should not be underestimated.

- *The UN Panel should stress the need for a balanced and nuanced approach to technology. The approach must embrace and prepare societies for the significant opportunities of the technological revolution while at the same time acknowledging and actively mitigating the challenges and risks. Getting the 'narrative' right is key to getting the global mindset right. Technology should serve humanity and not vice-versa. A balanced approach is therefore human(ity) centric.*

2. PROMOTE THAT THE TECH INDUSTRY IS PART OF THE EQUATION

Extraordinary times requires extraordinary coalitions. Characteristic of the digital age is the transcendent nature of new technologies. No aspect of life will be untouched. We need to rethink the relationship between state-actors and non-state actors. While legitimacy in global affairs ultimately lies in the

community of nations, bringing the technology industry into the equation is essential in order to find adequate solutions as well as to ensure that all actors take a level of responsibility proportional to their influence. This requires the UN and other international organisations to modernise and innovate their approach to partnerships and engagement with tech and other relevant industries and civil society – otherwise the dialogue will move elsewhere. We need the right mix of tech-industry leaders and government officials, as well as international organizations, academia and civil society, to work much closer together in order to maximize technology's benefit to society. Governments and regulators often struggle to keep up with the pace of technology and to fully understand its societal impact. As recent incidents have shown, the tech industry, on the other hand, is struggling with administrating the global reach and influence of their platforms.

> - *The UN Panel should underline that the tech industry must be brought into the center of discussions. With global influence comes global responsibility. Those driving innovation must help deliver answers to the questions their technologies create. Neither technology companies nor governments or international organisations can tackle these questions alone. We need commitment from all sides and a readiness to walk the talk. This demands a certain allocation of resources, but more importantly: A willingness to step out of our respective comfort zones.*

3. COMBAT THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The global online population has reached the 4 billion mark and continues to grow, most rapidly in Africa and Asia. In most developing economies, the majority of the population is under the age of 30. This generation of youth will be an immense resource for innovation in the coming years. Digitisation creates opportunities and jobs in new sectors. Smart phones and mobile payments already create enormous opportunities to lift millions out of poverty. Yet we have only seen the beginning of how digital technologies can create innovative, sustainable solutions in support of the SDG's. At the same time, the digital 'dividend' may quickly turn into a 'divide'. Unequal access to digital opportunities may exacerbate existing inequalities and create new fault lines between digital 'have' and 'have-nots'. Automation is going to render numerous jobs redundant, disrupt global value chains, and affect growth opportunities. This could be a source of new instability, conflict and migratory pressures - within and between countries and on a regional scale. We must make a conscious effort to reduce digital inequality and to leave no one behind through all means at our disposal. This goes for developing and developed economies alike, and requires major investments in digital infrastructure, skills and competences. But also for a heightened focus on capacity building to ensure governance mechanisms, revenue creation and key societal institutions are ready for the digital age.

> - *The UN Panel should emphasize that a stronger strategic focus on technology and innovation in development cooperation, humanitarian action and within the UN system is needed. In particular, we must invest more in digital skills and infrastructure to make sure all groups, especially youth, women and girls, are equipped to harness the benefits of digitalisation. Likewise, focus is needed to boost capacity building on key governance aspects to ensure sustainable economic value and revenue creation as well as fundamental rights (to privacy, data etc.) in the digital economy.*

4. GET REGULATION RIGHT

The debate around tech policy and regulation is often reduced to two camps: Those who want free reign and no government involvement, and those who see governments as the custodians for safeguarding the direction of new technology through regulation. This is a false dichotomy. It is not about yes or no to

regulation, but about getting regulation right. The ability of governments and regional organizations to exercise 'governance' in the 21st Century cannot, however, take place in a vacuum without recognizing the key role the industry plays. Smart regulation requires a much closer partnership between governments, the tech industry and civil society. Governments should promote a tech-optimistic approach to regulation with a view to maximizing the positive potentials of new technologies by allowing for experimentation and room for innovation. The industry on the other hand should proactively contribute to regulatory efforts in order to mitigate unintended consequences of new technology including its potential negative externalities. The development of ethical standards for the use of data and Artificial Intelligence is one important strand of work to reach this end. Lessons learned from international efforts – including in Denmark – to develop guidelines and recommendations should be utilized.

- *The UN Panel should promote an agile and 'light but right touch' approach to regulation, where governments support and create space for entrepreneurship and innovation, embrace the sharing economy and only intervenes to avoid biases, unfair market failures and to protect and safeguard legitimate societal interests, including values and institutions. To achieve this the tech industry as well as civil society must engage more actively in the regulatory processes.*

5. SAFEGUARD DEMOCRACY & HUMAN RIGHTS

Technology has the ability to empower citizens, develop new participatory processes and increase accountability and transparency. In a vacuum of checks and balances, however, technology has the ability to put our institutions and governance structures as well as individual rights at risk. In the last 12 months alone, more than 146 million people have been affected by breaches of personal data. Countries and regional organisations such as the EU has responded with stronger data protection legislation. At the same time, platforms have been misused to disseminate false information, influence democratic processes, promote polarization and facilitate terrorist recruiting. The increase in cyberattacks is jeopardising our institutions and critical infrastructure. Our approach to technology should therefore be rooted in a set of strong values with defending democracy, institutions and fundamental rights at its core. This includes emphasising the applicability of the UN Charter in cyberspace. The tech industry has a critical role to play, from the management suite to individual coders and engineers. Mainstreaming a responsible and ethical approach to technology is fundamental.

- *The UN Panel should underline that the tech industry has an unequivocal responsibility for ensuring that their technologies and platforms do not undermine or challenge democratic institutions and fundamental human rights. The UN itself should increase its capacity to assess how human rights are impacted positively and negatively by technology and to engage with the industry on these issues.*

6. ADVANCE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PUBLIC SECTOR DIGITALIZATION

Reaping the benefits of the digital age requires upgrading governance competences, skills and processes. In many countries, digital transformation of the public sector is lagging behind, slowing down or even preventing taking full advantage of technological advancement in support of economic growth and societal advancement in the digital economy. Governments have an important role in the digital transformation of society – a role which should not be underestimated. Creating a digitally savvy public sector does not happen overnight. It requires a political vision, a clear and ambitious strategy, the upgrading of skills and competences as well as significant investments in digital infrastructure and

coherent digital solutions. It also requires an adequate legal framework and procedures for protecting personal data. But the benefits are substantial: A digitally transformed public sector not only increases efficiency and effectiveness with better implementation of taxpayer funded programs, but also enables better and individualised service delivery to citizens and businesses. A digital public sector also supports the fight against corruption as it increases the transparency and accountability. Digital transformation of the public sector requires political leadership and a "digital first" approach. Ensuring the inclusion of all parts of society is a key enabler of a transformation of the public sector as well as society as a whole. As such, it will be important to strengthen international co-operation in the area and build upon substantial work done by for instance the OECD and the European Union on how best to prepare for the challenges of digital disruption and how to approach digital transformation through sharing of experiences and good practices

- *The UN Panel should promote the expansion of digital transformation through digitalization of the public sector to increase efficiency and effectiveness, improve quality of service delivery and ensure a supportive and inclusive societal change in order to prepare for the digital age. A strategic approach taking into account best practices on digital transformation efforts globally could help speed up implementation on all continents.*

7. EMPHASIZE THAT THE DIGITAL AGE REQUIRES MORE, NOT LESS, INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In summary, digital collaboration must be based on a balanced and proactive approach to technology. Industry and governments must work closer together to ensure that technology becomes a social good that benefits all – and not a zero-sum game. Due to the cross-border nature of digital technologies, international cooperation is more important than ever. The UN together with other multilateral and regional organisations has an indispensable role to play in setting global norms and rules for behavior. This role will not diminish in the digital age. A front-footed and digitally responsive UN that leads the way by mainstreaming the application of technology and digital solutions across its Funds and Programs will be a beacon for others to follow. Technology and digitalization will leave no arm of the UN untouched, from headquarters to country level. Peace and Security, global development and human rights will all be impacted by changes in technology application in the next decade. Integrating innovative solutions that harness technology and digitalization will be critical for the UN to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals – a business-as-usual-approach is will leave us far from realizing this ambitious agenda. The Secretary-General's reform agenda, which rightly also includes a strong digital dimension, is crucially important in this regard. But governments and the industry must also step up to the plate. The Danish government's decision to elevate technology to a foreign policy priority and to appoint a dedicated Tech Ambassador is an attempt at walking the talk. Denmark encourages similar initiatives from other countries and international institutions. The Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies from September 2018 includes a number of timely ideas. The suggestion to appoint a *Technology Envoy* to facilitate meaningful interaction between the UN system and the technology industry would be a welcomed concrete follow up to the High-Level Panel. At the same time, we need to protect and promote a free and open global internet at a point in time where this fundamental nature of the global IT infrastructure is under increasing pressure of fragmentation. It will be crucial to support and maintain the multi-stakeholder governance model and safeguard the role of the IGF and other key multi-stakeholder fora such as ICANN. Moreover, it is of fundamental importance that international rules and norms for responsible state behavior are adhered to not only in the physical world but in cyberspace as

well. Therefore, discussions concerning responsible state behavior in cyberspace should be continued in the UN First Committee building on consensus from the 2013 and 2015 reports of the UNGGE on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security.

> • *The UN Panel should encourage not only the UN but also member states and non-state actors, including the tech industry, to elevate technology and digitalization both domestically and as part of their international engagements. The appointment of Digital Envoys should be welcomed as an important step to increase international outreach, dialogue and cooperation to tackle the opportunities as well as the challenges of the digital age. The UN Panel should underline the importance of a free and open global internet and encourage the UN, member states and other non-state actors to support the multi-stakeholder governance model.*

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The Government of Denmark reiterates its support for the work of the Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation and stands ready to support its mission, including by providing – where deemed relevant by the Panel – detailed examples, cases and lessons learned. Denmark also reiterates its offer to assist the Panel in co-organising events with the industry in Silicon Valley and globally through the Office of the Tech Ambassador of Denmark.