

**Launch of Mauritius School on Internet Governance 2023 on Saturday 08 April 2023 at 09:30 at Le Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, Port Louis.**

I am pleased to greet this third edition of the Mauritius School on Internet Governance (SIG) Forum 2023.

My congratulations to the Halley Movement Coalition and the Mauritius Internet Governance Forum for having the vision of a vibrant African digital future and in so generously hosting this edition on the theme “**Empowering Learners on Internet Governance**”.

We are all conscious by now that technologies are transforming lives and livelihoods. They are also outpacing regulations and exacerbating inequalities. We often hear that the future will be digital. But the future of digital must be human-centred.

To achieve this, the sharing and exchange of ideas, thoughts and information are the spark of human interaction, enabling us to debate, to share, to grow. Hence the appropriateness of The 2023 Mauritius School on Internet Governance theme.

It is with keen interest that I have learnt that this third programme which will extend over nearly one month is a capacity-building program that aims to provide a platform for people from all industries and backgrounds to gain the skills needed to engage effectively in the digital world.

## **Ladies and gentlemen**

Building capacity or providing training in Internet Governance (IG) is critical to enabling stakeholder groups to participate fully in all IG-related processes. Schools on Internet Governance (SIGs) were created specifically to support this objective.

We must recognize that Internet has had an extraordinary impact on our life, be it in business, in governance, in our social life, etc. Millions of people around the world use computers and the internet every day. We all use it in school, at work and even at home. The Computer has made our life easier, it has brought so many benefits to the society but it has also brought some problems, and cybercrimes is one of them.

As the world becomes ever more interconnected and globalised, there is little that the internet has not touched or transformed. How this global resource is governed in the future will affect how we use it, and how it evolves.

Information and communication technologies have radically expanded our capacities to connect with each other.

At 22%, the level of internet use in low-income countries remains far below that of high-income countries, which are approaching universal use (91%).

The digital divide, across gender and geographic lines, hinders the full potential of human connection.

Those who are left behind are excluded from access to vital information, global discussions and economic opportunity. In other words, they are unseen and unheard.

Internet governance requires not only an understanding of the variability in access to and use of the internet across the country, but it should also ensure an equitable distribution of resources, facilitate access for all and ensure a stable and secure functioning of the Internet

### **Dear participants**

The Internet is rapidly transforming the world's economic, cultural and social environment. There are numerous examples of its impact on connected users and their communities. The Internet's irreversible presence as a driver of economic, social and political development has profound implications for those who can or cannot take advantage of its opportunities. The industry is gearing up to the next billion Internet users, making education key.

Yet in global Internet governance debates, the theme of education is barely acknowledged, as if this sector was still untouched by Internet evolutions and still under a latent subsidiarity principle that makes it the prerogative of states.

In addition, children do not appear as a stakeholder group in Internet governance. When decisions about their online lives are made by adults, they mostly concern protection from harm, as children are construed as a vulnerable group. This is in deep contrast with their screen time, which begins at ever younger ages. This also does not take into account the increasing numbers of children who access the

Internet via multiple devices. Indeed the precise numbers of children worldwide who are accessing the Internet is difficult to ascertain.

Taking this range of online childhoods into account in a holistic manner, children must be considered as having agency and responsibilities from an earlier age, while still needing to be protected from risks of different kinds.

The unprecedented degrees of exposure to all sorts of materials and resources online are an additional element to take into account: in most countries, children have access to content traditionally reserved for adults, be it harmful content (such as violence and pornography) or specialized high-level content with abstract information. I am confident that during the forum you will consider these issues.

With the internet overtaking TV as children's favourite pastime, there is also a real opportunity to engage children in cyber security by incorporating it into primary and secondary school teaching materials. Kids take technology classes, surf the web for school projects, and obviously use the Internet in their free time for all kinds of things, so it's a good idea for teachers to include some cyber security talk in their lessons.

Today, our world is home to the largest youth population ever in history. There are currently 1.2 billion people around the globe between the ages of 15 and 24 and this number is expected to grow. By 2030, almost 2 billion young people will become part of the world's youth cohort.

The power of youth is immense. Young people are fearless, brave, dynamic and self-confident. They have ideas, creativity and energy to shape a better world. They

are full of hope and through innovation and imagination, they are problem solvers and have a great potential to generate a positive social change in the world. They are the critical agents of change – and we need them on board to build an increasingly digitalised world together.

There has been extensive talks about youth leadership and empowerment in Internet Governance, and how the next generation leaders play a crucial role in connecting the next billion where individual efforts and approach matters.

Moreover, how we develop the core values and how the new leaders will implement and engage towards creating better awareness and capacity building is what the fundamental concept of empowerment completely depends upon.

I believe the future of education should be part of the global debate on Internet governance. We have made it through a digital transition already during the pandemic, where we went from traditional schooling to on-line learning, where youth are utilizing information and communication technology (ICT) as support tools.

Probably we can pick this up as a notch and start teaching the youth from a younger age about Internet Governance. This new field can be integrated into the school curriculum as a key discipline which can also nurture their human rights and understanding of shared values, which, in turn, will help to build more inclusive societies. It is high time we start teaching the youth in schools early on how their active participation in Internet governance can empower them to become actors in policy deliberations.

**Distinguished participants,**

The amazing value of the internet lies in its ability to deliver on a promise already presaged by article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights almost 75 years ago:

**“That everyone has the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”**

We have an opportunity to get it right and to reconnect the human community.

Let’s use it.

The school on internet governance will offer you during these few days a broad curriculum on topics such as cyber security, data privacy and protection, digital inclusion and many more. I am sure this program will broaden your knowledge on internet governance and its models. It will open doors to more opportunities of your day-to-day lives.

At the end of the Forum you will come up with valuable recommendations on how to harness the benefits of digital technologies while limiting the potential harms to citizens, enterprises, and indeed governments; and how to ensure digital inclusion of all people in this dynamic environment by eliminating barriers in the process of Internet Governance.

I shall conclude by congratulating once more the organisers and wish you all a fruitful Forum.