

Consultation of Civil Society with Member States in advance of the 2nd Preparatory Committee Meeting for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5)

Wednesday July 28, 2021 from 8:15-10:00am (NY Time)

Statement from Just Net Coalition

Your Excellencies Ms. Rahab Fatima and Mr. Bob Rae, and Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS and esteemed colleagues.

The Doha Programme of Action comes at a critical juncture.

The Just Net Coalition is happy to note that the Draft puts front and centre the inflection point we are at in a global economy redefined by digitalization.

The digital paradigm holds promise, but it also signals worrisome challenges.

We would urge that these are more clearly acknowledged and addressed by the Doha Programme of Action. We have contributed detailed comments to the Text that was submitted to the esteemed office of the UN.

Current models in the platform economy are based on a winner-take-all model led by a handful of digital firms who are de facto owners of the data amassed in a non-regime of free data flows. This data, locked up in private enclosures provide the vital foundation for a new architecture for value creation in the LDCs. The prior failures of the market model of technology transfer cannot be forgotten. Yet, the Zero Draft continues to fall back on the standard rhetoric of “private sector partnerships” for research and innovation, technology transfer and technical competencies.

This misplaced faith we believe will lead to loss of technological sovereignty, and a hollowing out of local productive capacity in the LDCs.

Platform, data, and AI models that promote distributive justice in the digital economy depend on development financing for the creation of digital public goods.

Secondly, the e-commerce development agenda that is outlined does not adequately emphasize the importance of LDCs preserving the policy space to assert their jurisdictional sovereignty over cross-border data flows to protect and promote their strategic economic interests.

Further, the vision of digital governance, as put forth by the UN Secretary General's Roadmap, has been held up as the standard-bearer for an equitable digital future for all. However, the proposals for global digital cooperation in this Roadmap dangerously legitimize the role of Big Tech in digital governance.

The Just Net Coalition calls for the following specific changes :

Proposal1. Targets with respect to LDCs reaping the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution should shift the bar to building not just ‘adequate’, but also ‘autonomous’ platform, data and AI infrastructure.

Proposal 2. Targets with respect to significantly improving STI infrastructure in LDCs should also include ‘support to LDCs in evolving national level data and AI strategy roadmaps by 2030’ and ‘significantly improving domestic innovation capabilities for national economic resilience’.

Proposal 3. By 2031, at least 10% of ODA to LDCs should focus on supporting the development of autonomous connectivity, platform, data, and AI infrastructures.

Proposal 4. By 2025, the year that marks the WSIS plus 20 review milestone, countries must usher in an international regime for data that respects the jurisdictional sovereignty of national data resources.

Proposal 5. The compass must shift from improving ‘ease-of-business’ for multinational corporations and move towards the reiteration of the human rights obligations of business and mandatory technology transfer conditionalities in private sector partnerships for science, technology, and innovation.

Proposal 6. Global digital governance arrangements should be founded on the WSIS principles of a people-centered, development-oriented digital paradigm. Dominant digital trade, taxation and IP regimes must be transformed in order to preserve the policy space for digital industrialization.

We need development partnerships for people and planet, not for private profit.