

National Statement
80th Session of UNESCAP
ESCAP Headquarters, Bangkok, Thailand

Chair of ESCAP's 80th Commission;

Madame Executive Secretary of ESCAP;

Excellencies;

Distinguished participants,

Madame Chair,

At the outset, allow me to express our deep appreciation to you Madame Chair for your stellar leadership in guiding the work of the 79th Session of the Commission and to express Vanuatu's gratitude to Madame Executive Secretary and the ESCAP Secretariat for all the hard work preparing for the 80th Session of the Commission.

We have passed the mid-point of the global race towards achieving the 17 SDGs by 2030 and yet progress towards achieving these goals have been ominously slow. Vanuatu welcomes the theme for this year's Commission Session "Leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific" because we recognize the importance of digital innovation in advancing and catalyzing our development aspirations. We recognize the role of digital innovation in changing behaviours and replacing "business-as-usual" with new and revolutionary practices.

Vanuatu is proud to employ digital technology policies that are open and rights-based. We strive to integrate digital technologies into all areas of business in Vanuatu and in doing so, we can see the changes in the way economic and social activities are being conducted even at the grassroots level.

The Vanuatu Government also recognizes the requisite to address the needs of the marginalized, particularly women, youth, persons with disabilities and the poorest and to empower them to contribute meaningfully to economic

development. In September 2023, we launched a new digital payment platform, part of ongoing efforts to transform our nation's financial infrastructure to build a cutting-edge financial system that can support our digital economy and drive inclusive economic development.

The Vanuatu Government in collaboration with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has embarked on an initiative to facilitate digital transformation at the grassroots level. Our furthest behind are being connected to the internet using VSAT infrastructure, with plans to offer digital literacy to the marginalized communities aimed at empowering them to enhance exploit broadband connectivity through strengthening digital skills and making its use affordable.

Madame Chair,

As richer nations become increasingly proficient at leveraging digital technology and innovation for creating added value, a few smaller nations risk falling behind. While transformative digital innovation can accelerate progress in achieving sustainable development, it can entrench inequality, widening development gaps between advanced economies and smaller economies like Vanuatu. To leverage the great potential of digital innovation for development that leaves no one behind, it is imperative that we make deliberate efforts to steer digital innovation in a course that is affordable, safeguards sovereign data, is inclusive and does not aggravate existing inequalities.

While the drive to achieve sustainable development goals by 2030 is slow, we know for sure that harnessing digital innovation can be a catalyst for accelerating our efforts both at country level and as a collective. Failing to ride the waves of digital technology and leveraging opportunities that align with it risk leaving those already behind even further behind.