Opening Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)

President of the Economic and Social Council

Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation

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It is my great pleasure to welcome everyone to the event known as the 10th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals. Whatever may be the practice in other parts of the world, at the United Nations Headquarters, we continue to talk about the Sustainable Development Goals because we think they are exceptionally important.

This 10th anniversary is a bit of a chance to reflect on the importance and the increased and heightened importance of the work we want to do on science, technology, and innovation. Just yesterday, we had an opportunity to start the week early with a meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Artificial Intelligence, which I hope that many of

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you were able to attend. It was an exciting meeting and one that was really worth having.

We're going to continue with this under, not only the umbrella of ECOSOC but with the full support of the General Assembly, who endorsed two important statements: the Pact for the Future and its Global Digital Compact (GDC). These agreements call for, as you all know,

- An open and equitable environment for scientific and technological advancement,

- Stronger safeguards for human rights in the age of emerging technologies, and

- Further cooperation on digital governance.

These are all issues we talked about yesterday in our meeting on Artificial Intelligence and it was a very productive discussion.

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The General Assembly, and the UN in general, can pass a resolution but we always have to think about how we make resolutions a reality. How do we put them into effect? How do make them have the impact we want them to have?

This is part of the job of this Forum, to help us look at how we can accelerate the work that we all do to achieve the SDGs and how we can find solutions to which science and technology will no doubt make an enormous contribution. But we all know that it's not just science and technology that will somehow magically make this happen by pronouncing the words "science and technology."

I think following our meeting yesterday, it's important to reinforce some of the messages that we heard. And they were in fact reinforced by what the delegates told us themselves, what many nation-states that are here told us.

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The first is the role of national governments. There is an expression

that we use in our conversation where we talk to people and say, "you

have to own this." I can't emphasize how strongly and how important

it is for national governments, for the 193 member states of the

United Nations, to feel and to embrace the fact that national

governments, have to own this – with the support of others. I'm not

saying without partnerships and support of the international financial

institutions, from the UN, from donor countries of various kinds – all of

that is important.

The key thing is that national governments themselves have to own it.

And in particular, they have to own it by building the digital

infrastructure, by ensuring affordable internet access, and by

promoting digital literacy. This is not something we're saying you have

to do on your own. It's just saying that you have to *own* what it is that needs to be done.

In addition to that, I would add to the comments on infrastructure a few additional points. Training, training, training. Training public servants to understand what this new world is all about. Training people to understand the tools that they can use – that they must learn how to use – in order to make governments efficiently and effectively, in order to make institutions work efficiently and effectively.

At the United Nations itself part of UN80, the process we're going through to try to improve the way the human works, we are learning that this is something which can only happen with the assistance of science and innovation. And yes, just as we expect nation-states to own it, we expect each and every Agency to own it and we expect the

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Secretariat and the United Nations itself to own it – and to own it more efficiently, more effectively, and better than it has been done up until now.

This forum is actually very important event in the rhythm of the UN calendar and the organization. It going to be followed an important international conference of Financing for Development, which is taking place in Spain at the end of June, the High-Level Political Forum of ECOSOC, which takes place in July, and the World Summit on Social Development in November in Qatar.

Sometimes people wonder why we keep having these meetings, why they take place all over the world. The only way in which we can animate the discussions in every country, in every place and get people to understand that we have to keep talking about this and

communicating about it and sharing because we want to overcome the divides in technology. We need to overcome the sense of exclusion that many people feel. We need to understand and embrace the fact that if we don't have access to computing, we cannot overcome the digital divide.

The fact that we have a digital divide this morning is not deliberate but perhaps gives you a sense of how frustrating it is to be cutoff by technology, not able to have events, not able to do things. Perhaps, just briefly, we're experiencing what billions of people are experiencing, which is they don't have access, and they need access.

So, let me express my thanks to the Group of Ten High-level Representatives to Promote STI for the SDGs, the UN Interagency Task Team, and all of you for coming today and participating. I want to thank all of those who will be hosting and moderating and

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participating. We have an exceptional number of people, and I'm delighted to have all of you here.

Merci. Muchas gracias a todos.

We have to keep working together to achieve what we want to achieve the results we want to achieve.