Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum
Hyderabad, India, 3-6 December 2008

Address by Assistant Secretary-General Jomo Kwame Sundaram

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here with you in Hyderabad and my deep thanks go to the
Government of India for hosting the Third Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum
(IGF).

India is a very appropriate venue for this meeting. In the words of Under-Secretary-
General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang, India provides "a practical
example of how tremendous economic growth can be achieved through harnessing the
tools which the Internet has placed at our disposal". Here, in India's Silicon Plateau, we
see at first hand how well the savvy application of Information and Communication
Technologies (ICTs) has accelerated the nation's development.

The Internet has become the backbone of our globalized world. Today, some 1.5 billion people,
a little over a fifth of humanity, use the Internet. That total has grown by half a billion people
since the IGF held its first meeting in Athens two years ago. Since 2000, the total number of
Internet users has grown at an annual rate of nearly 15%. And that growth has been
accelerating. The Internet is transforming our lives, and so, it behooves us all to take an interest
in how it is run and managed.

That is very much the spirit of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), created by the General
Assembly in 2005, with an initial mandate of five years. The Forum builds on the UN's
tradition of multi-stakeholder cooperation. The Forum brings together all major stakeholder
groups - governments, the private sector, civil society, and the academic and technical
communities - to debate, on an equal footing, Internet governance and related public-policy
issues, exchange information and share good practices. The IGF is not a new organization or
agency. And rather than being a decision-making body, the IGF is a space for frank and
enlightened debate. The Forum provides a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to foster an
innovative dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations.

The IGF seeks to exercise 'soft governance' of the Internet, by influencing the public and
private decision-makers who do, in fact, govern the Net. The Forum shapes and informs
the decision-making processes of other institutions and governments, and prepares the
ground for negotiations that will take place in intergovernmental and other forums.

The Forum is a place to launch ideas - trial balloons - that can serve as the basis of
broader agreement on concrete ways and means to shape and govern the Internet. It

fosters 'dynamic coalitions' through which your ideas can gather strength and support to influence policy outcomes related to the Internet.

Such dynamic coalitions already include valuable initiatives on issues such as the Internet's impact on climate change, child-safety, freedom of expression, an Internet Bill of Rights, access to knowledge, accessibility in remote areas and linguistic diversity. Around the world, multi-stakeholder coalitions, woven together by the Internet, have been dramatically swaying the course of political outcomes, not least of elections. The Forum can certainly do the same for governance of the Internet.

The evolution of the IGF – from the first meeting held in Athens in 2006 to the second in Rio de Janeiro in 2007 to the present meeting in Hyderabad – has shown that the IGF has become a valuable melting pot for forging a common understanding of complex Internet issues from diverse point of views.

The year 2010 will represent a turning point for the Forum, when the General Assembly will decide on whether or not to extend the initial five-year mandate of the IGF, based on a review of its work and achievements. It is now time to reflect on how this review process should be conducted. The session this week – on taking stock of the work of the IGF so far and suggesting the way forward – will provide a first opportunity for an exchange of ideas. As a result of this consultative review process, the Secretary-General will make his recommendations to enable the General Assembly to take a decision on the IGF at its session in 2010.

Whatever may happen after that year – and the ultimate decision on the future of the IGF belongs to member states – it is my pleasure to announce that we already have a host country and a venue for the 2010 meeting. The 2010 meeting will take place in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania. I would like to thank the Government of Lithuania for its generous offer and, at the same time, express my gratitude to the Government of Azerbaijan, which also made a bid for the 2010 meeting. Allow me to encourage the Government of Azerbaijan to make a new bid, should the IGF mandate be extended.

This year's meeting programme shows once again a wide variety of events with multi-stakeholder involvement. The overall theme - "Internet for All" - points the way to the future. We are not there yet, but we are on the way to a not too distant future when the next billion people will have access to the Internet. Providing access alone, however, is not enough: the access needs to take into account the diversity of the world's population, the diversity of languages but also the diversity of people of different abilities. To provide access to people with disabilities is a strong focus of this year's meeting, and rightly so. A society is evaluated by how it deals with its weakest members. That also applies to the Internet.

The dramatic growth of the Internet – whose total of world-wide users has tripled from half a billion people in 2000 to nearly a billion and a half people in 2008 – masks tremendous inter-regional and national inequalities in usage that make up the digital divide. Some 39.5 per cent of all users are now in Asia, although the continent is home to

66 per cent of the world's population. Some 26.3 per cent of users reside in Europe with 12 per cent of the world's population, and 17 per cent in North America with 5 per cent of the world's population. However, Africa, with 14 per cent of the world's population has only 3.5 per cent of users. Clearly, the IGF has much work ahead of it, in terms of suggesting further ways to bridge the digital divide, particularly through dynamic coalitions to foster an inclusive governance and evolution of the Internet.

The IGF will continue to accompany the evolution of the Internet. It will certainly provide useful counsel to decision-makers and policy-makers on the further deployment and equitable development of the Internet and how best to use it, while coping with abuse and threats to its security. Furthermore, the IGF will both build bridges between the various actors involved and deepen their understanding of how the Internet works and is governed.

I wish you a productive and successful meeting and look forward to the IGF review process. I trust you will all engage actively in this process and let us know your views on the IGF as a worthwhile experiment in multi-stakeholder cooperation.