Distinguished Participants,

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is my pleasure to be here with you today at the **9th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs**.
- As someone working for the Cabinet Office of the Government of The Bahamas, but also as the new **Chair of the UN Internet Governance Forum Multistakeholder Advisory Group**, I wear two hats. I am also a strong advocate of Small Island Developing States.
- The most significant opportunity today, is the potential of **digital transformation to enable** and achieve the SDGs for economic and social development. The success of this is through meaningful, universal connectivity and the harnessing of digital technologies in a safe, enriching, productive, and affordable way, for ALL.
- The challenge is this, the groups that are disadvantaged economically, socially, and educationally also tend to be **disadvantaged digitally**. As you may know, SIDS share several common **sustainable development challenges**, such as remoteness, limited resources, susceptibility to natural disasters, as well as vulnerability to external economic shocks.
The potential of digital transformation for SIDS is significantly reduced as the levels of inequalities and exclusion seen offline is also reflected online.

- **Digital technologies** offer great potential to address the most relentless challenges. Technology is here to stay, and we must look at it as a tool or asset that is an integral part of our daily routines no matter where a person stands socially or economically. However, the reality is that SIDS population is not entirely connected to the Internet nor have ready affordable access to digital technologies.

- We should further encourage the digital transformation journey of SIDS, as digitalization can only positively affect the lives of citizens and their economy:
  1. It will require policymakers to embrace the concept of digital innovation and inclusion as a priority policy goal, set indicators and targets for its measurement and achievement, and include it in national strategies, policies, and implementation plans.
  2. National strategies, policies, and implementation plans should foster an environment for digital transformation and innovation, ensure the enhancement of digital infrastructure and connectivity, and promote capacity building to bridge the digital divides. I wish to emphasize here, that capacity building should not be an afterthought but a forethought. Educational and training systems need to be revamped, they need to be more innovative and agile and inclusive of science and technology. There should be a deliberate effort to leverage science and technology to take advantage of social and economic opportunities. This is critical to reaching the unserved and underserved communities.
  3. Resourcing initiatives are paramount. Non-traditional financing approaches can support and build networks, including community networks, in areas with little or no connectivity, such as libraries and parks, and other public spaces. **This was an approach used by The Bahamas with their “WiFi in the Park” initiative, a public-private sector endeavor. Public spaces in remote communities are equipped with wifi.** Addressing gaps in access, including the quality of access, plays a central role in building an inclusive Internet and digital societies.
4. Last, although there are shared experiences and multiple synergies amongst the SIDS, these states are spread over three geographical regions, making it even **more difficult to collaborate and make their voices heard**. I would like to encourage the SIDS population to **elevate your voice even more in the international discourse** - especially that relating to Information & Communication Technology and Critical Resource Management Policies.

Now, how can SIDS engage in the IGF?

- **The IGF operates on a multistakeholder basis**, where all stakeholders participate on an equal footing.
- We are committed to upholding the **multistakeholder open, inclusive, and people-centred model of Internet and digital governance**. We are particularly focused on engaging missing voices, particularly stakeholders of all disciplines from the Global South.
- Besides holding the global annual IGF, we grew a network of **170 national and regional IGF initiatives**, which provide a multistakeholder platform to discuss digital policy issues of communities at local levels.
- NRIs are literally **building ecosystems for science, technology and innovation to drive economic growth and sustainable development**. Over the years, they have brought experts from all stakeholder groups together to discuss digital governance of their country and regions and inspire policymakers to make informed decisions.
- Currently, out of 170, there are **13 active NRIs in SIDS**.
- For those interested in joining discussions, the **SIDS IGF will take place on 29 May 2024 in Antigua and Barbuda**, and online. The **Caribbean IGF** is scheduled this year in Guyana, end of August. The **Pacific IGF** will convene in Wellington, New Zealand, beginning of September.
- Besides participating at these sub-regional IGFs, I would like to invite you to explore on our IGF website the various **national IGF Initiatives**. I would also like to encourage you to create new **national or regional initiatives** that are not yet existing in your respective countries.
- The establishment of these national and regional IGF initiatives has also **elevated SIDS voices at global levels**. We noticed a considerable
increase of participants from SIDS at the global Forum, who present outcomes or debate on issues emerging from their NRI discussions.

- What does it mean for SIDS? That they:
  - take part in best practice exchanges and policy development.
  - contribute to the shaping of the global IGF key messages.

- With that, I warmly invite you to take active participation in the upcoming 19th IGF taking place this year from 15 to 19 December in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with the overarching theme “Building our Multistakeholder Digital Future”, and the aim to further advance inclusion in the digital age.

- In order to be as inclusive as possible, our Global South Fund supports travels of participants from developing countries, including from SIDS.

- Each Forum is in a hybrid format, as we aim at creating meaningful remote participation, to be as equal as possible to onsite attendance.

- The goal of digital inclusion is to level up the online environment so that everyone can embrace equitable digital development and socio-economic growth.

- I thank you very much.