

Paris, 22 July 2020

OPEN LETTER TO G20 MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Dear Ministers,

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented health and economic crisis, affecting the lives and livelihoods of workers, as well as the continued operations of businesses globally. As the international community continues to respond to the pandemic, having the right policy settings in place to enable digital technologies to both tackle the crisis and build a more resilient global economy will prove essential.

We welcome the COVID-19 Response Statement following the extraordinary G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting on 30 April 2020, where you emphasise the role of digital technologies in strengthening and accelerating our collective response. We believe that the current crisis also carries with it an opportunity to devise and implement ambitious policy initiatives which can help unlock the full potential of digital technologies and enable us to build back better.

In this context, we write to draw your attention to five specific policy interventions that, if adopted, will enable the deployment of digital technologies to tackle the crisis and build a more resilient global economy. Specifically:

- 1. Devise long-term strategies to bridge the digital divide:** Digital technologies have proven to be strategic assets, enhancing economies and improving the wellbeing of those who can access and use them. But access to, and use of, digital technologies is uneven, a factor that will continue to weigh on the global economy. Indeed, it is estimated that almost half of the world's population remains offline¹ and significant gaps in access continue to hinder our ability to collectively respond to the crisis. To address this systemic challenge, we call on G20 Ministers to resolutely commit to long-term strategies that boost investment in digital infrastructure and promote the development of STEM and digital skills across communities. G20 Ministers, in close partnership with the private sector and relevant international organisations, must continue to bridge digital divides and create an inclusive online environment, both at a national level and across the globe. Greater connectivity has proven to be essential amidst the current crisis, but it is also a precondition for a successful rebuild of the global economy.
- 2. Develop a robust global framework on cybersecurity:** A truly global and inclusive online environment can only be achieved if governments commit to the highest cybersecurity standards. The current crisis has further highlighted the urgent need for measurable improvements on the ground. Malicious actors have seized on new opportunities to take advantage of the disruptive effects of the crisis, posing a threat to livelihoods and economic development.² The threat has also been particularly acute for small- and medium-sized enterprises which often lack the necessary resources for adequate protection. The global

1 ITU Publications, [Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures](#) (2019).

2 United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the United Kingdom's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), [COVID-19 Exploited by Malicious Cyber Actors](#) (2020).

nature of information networks and digitally-enabled services requires an unprecedented degree of international and multistakeholder cooperation if we are to leverage the empowering effects of digital technologies and successfully tackle their harmful use.

We urge G20 Ministers to show leadership in advancing rules, norms and principles of responsible State behaviour in cyberspace while recognising the need of many States worldwide for capacity building and technical assistance. Programmes of this nature will require increased resourcing as well as the participation of organisations with relevant expertise.

3. Advance data free flow with trust: A secure online environment is the first step in realising the full potential of data-driven economies. The volume and pace of global data production is increasing rapidly, from 0.3 zettabytes in 2007,³ to 33 zettabytes in 2018, to an expected 175 zettabytes in 2025.⁴ Data has become an essential part of economic development, driving global trade and productivity gains across all sectors of the economy. Companies of all sizes, sectors and locations depend on the free flow of data to conduct business and create value for communities. Enhancing the availability and interoperability of data between relevant stakeholders and across borders will uncover new sources of innovation and growth that will help rebuild economies post-COVID. Therefore, we call on G20 Ministers to recognise the importance of free flow of data and the need to balance the broad use of data with high privacy, security and ethical standards. Recent developments regarding the US-EU Privacy Shield demonstrate yet again the importance of interoperable frameworks. We call on Ministers to reiterate the constructive language of the G20 Osaka leaders' declaration and to build on the concept of data free flow with trust. We also encourage G20 Ministers to further invest in the infrastructure and skills that underpin the data economy to ensure that economic actors can seize new growth opportunities.

4. Enable responsible, human-centric and trustworthy artificial intelligence: Public policies that increase the global availability and movement of data will enable businesses and citizens to reap the benefits of artificial intelligence (AI). AI can help generate new insights and lead to better outcomes in every aspect of the world around us. G20 Ministers, in close partnership with the private sector, must lead the way in the development and use of responsible, human-centric and trustworthy AI technologies. Building on the OECD AI principles endorsed by G20 leaders, we call on G20 Ministers to further strengthen the multidisciplinary, evidence-based and multistakeholder dialogue around the analysis of public policy on AI.

Furthermore, we urge G20 Ministers to continue to invest in ecosystems which are capable of processing the large amounts of data needed to develop, improve and apply AI. ICC will continue to actively work with international organisations, governments, academia, and civil society to support trustworthy, globally compatible and market-driven policies that will help unlock the societal and economic benefits of AI. Importantly, ICC will work in partnership with other organisations to explore and draw insights from the practical application of AI ethics in a business context.

5. Maintain momentum on the Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce: The crisis has put a spotlight on digitally-enabled international trade and on the importance of advancing the plurilateral negotiations on the trade-related aspects of e-commerce. Fragmented national rules on data governance, privacy and consumer protection have acted as major impediments to trade, creating new market barriers and increasing costs. This has proven particularly detrimental to businesses during the current crisis. International e-commerce requires data to flow freely and efficiently across borders, without being limited by technical

³ Hill & Lopez. 2011. The world's technological capacity to store, communicate, and compute information. *Science* 332:60-65.

⁴ European Commission, [A European Strategy for Data](#) (2019).

barriers or anti-competitive bottlenecks, while abiding by privacy and security rules. It is critical for G20 Ministers to show leadership and help drive the momentum of the plurilateral negotiations on the trade-related aspects of e-commerce. We believe that these negotiations provide an opportunity to establish a holistic package of trade disciplines, rules and assistance that can help promote inclusive and sustainable economic development. Part of that package should include a permanent prohibition of customs duties on electronic transmissions. Beyond the Joint Statement Initiative, we call on G20 Ministers to continue to champion extending the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions.

Under your leadership, global business has mobilised at scale to tackle the current health and economic crisis. Digital technologies have been integral in this endeavour. While digital technologies have again proven their worth in the current context, it has also become increasingly clear that your continued leadership, in close partnership with the private sector and civil society, is urgently needed to address the many gaps that the crisis has further brought to the fore. Only then will we be able to unlock the full potential of digital technologies as we look to rebuild the global economy.

The International Chamber of Commerce—the institutional representative of more than 45 million businesses in over 100 countries—will continue to provide support and meaningful business contribution to the Digital Economy Task Force and other G20 initiatives to ensure that digital technologies work for everyone, every day, everywhere.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.W.H. Denton'.

John W.H. Denton AO
Secretary General
International Chamber of Commerce