

Broadband Commission Open Statement

5th United Nations Conference on the Least
Developed Countries (LDC5)



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CONFERENCE ON THE
LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

BROADBAND COMMISSION
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Open Statement from the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5)

The [Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development](#) addresses this Open Statement to the 5th United Nations Conference of the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) convening every 10 years and held in 2022 at a critical time, as the final decade of action for the 2030 agenda gathers pace.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical need for broadband technologies. However, as the world continues to embrace digital business practices and services, progress towards digital inclusion is slowing down, especially in LDCs. Closing the digital divide by mainstreaming digital skills and by providing affordable infrastructure, devices and services is critical to the sustainable development of the LDCs. The time is now to accelerate impactful change.

The Commission is convinced that achieving universal and affordable connectivity is essential for meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and to ensure no-one is left behind in the hardest-to-connect communities. In line with the Universal Connectivity Manifesto and the UN Secretary General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, the Broadband Commission is calling on governments, the private sector, NGOs and civil society to join forces for the LDC5 Conference in making concrete pledges and putting forward initiatives towards connectivity through existing platforms, including [Partner2Connect Digital Coalition](#) and the Digital for Development Hub ([D4D Hub](#)). These policy, financial, advocacy and programmatic commitments could help tackle barriers to digital inclusion to incentivize infrastructure deployment and localized services in LDCs.

For more than a decade, the Commission has been advocating through our Global Broadband Targets 2025 to expand broadband infrastructure and provide the unconnected and under connected populations around the world with accessible, affordable, and meaningful connectivity, access and use.

According to the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) and UN-OHRLLS report [Connectivity in the Least Developed Countries](#), launched in 2021, a lack of awareness of what the internet is, is the largest barrier to adoption. Other critical barriers include affordability and digital skills in LDCs, these should be jointly addressed by public and private stakeholders to reduce usage gaps significantly and rapidly. In the world's 46 LDCs, only 25% of the population is online. In 2020, 56 developing economies (including 4 LDCs) achieved the target of maintaining an expenditure of less than 2% monthly GNI per capita entry level services for mobile broadband, while this remained unaffordable in 84 countries. A significant gap remains between uptake and

targets – which underlines an urgent need for policies that prioritize demand-side challenges and address barriers to Internet adoption. There is also a need to address specific barriers to women’s internet adoption, as a significant digital gender divide persists, particularly in LDCs.

It is the goal of the Broadband Commission to realize universal connectivity, as stated in its [Universal Connectivity Manifesto](#). Reaching this goal for LDCs “will require collective, collaborative efforts by all stakeholders” to:

- (1) Establish a baseline for universal digital connectivity,
- (2) Identify and support public-private financing of universal broadband
- (3) Advocate for enabling ICT regulatory environments, capacity building & online safety.

To reach this goal, Broadband Commissioners have developed a [number of recommendations](#) on addressing key barriers to achieving universal connectivity to ‘build back better with broadband’ and support LDCs in their digital transformation process for sustainable social and economic development.

Signed,

Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Commission

H.E. President Paul Kagame

President of Rwanda, Co-Chair of the Commission

Mr Carlos Slim Helú

President of the Carlos Slim Foundation, Co-Chair of the Commission

Mr Houlin Zhao

ITU Secretary-General, Co-Vice Chair of the Commission

Ms Audrey Azoulay

UNESCO Director-General, Co-Vice Chair of the Commission

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Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy African Union Commission

Dr. Hessa Al Jaber

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DG H.E. Engineer Majed Sultan Al Mesmar

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Chief Executive Officer, KT Corporation

Mr Adrian Lovett

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President and Chief Executive Officer, Nokia
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Mr Hans Vestberg

Chief Executive Officer, Verizon

Mr Ziang Xu

Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, ZTE Corporation

Ms Sun Yafang

Member of Core Elite Group, Huawei Technologies

Executive Director

Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, Executive Director of the Broadband Commission

About the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development was established in 2010 by ITU and UNESCO with the aim of boosting the importance of broadband on the international policy agenda and expanding broadband access in every country as key to accelerating progress towards national and international development targets. Led by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Carlos Slim Helù of Mexico, it is co-chaired by ITU's Secretary-General Houlin Zhao and UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay. It comprises over 50 Commissioners who represent a cross-cutting group of top CEO and industry leaders, senior policymakers and government representatives, and experts from international agencies, academia and organizations concerned with development. Learn more at: www.broadbandcommission.org.