



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

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**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar
at the at the Human Rights 75 high-level event
The Future of Human Rights and Digital Technologies Roundtable**

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Distinguished Presidents, Vice-Presidents,
Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Opening this round table allows me to put forward the proposition that today digital technologies are similar to natural resources such as air and water. Our individual and societal well-being and development depend on their availability and governance.

Digital technology has already led to massive gains in productivity and value, but these benefits are not resulting in shared prosperity. As pointed out by the Secretary-General of the United Nations: "our digital world is one of divides." Divides across regions, gender, income, language, and age groups. To prevent digital inequalities becoming an irreversible global trend, we must think global and in terms of all stakeholders. Unilateral regional, national or industrial actions are insufficient. This must involve the cooperation of all.

Behind the digital divides lies a massive governance gap. We need to address the current governance gap and coordinate on national as well as international governance arrangements in order to prevent digital abuse and misuse. Again, we must work together and fast. The current trend where technological development is much faster than the development of regulations results in ill-equipped assessments and responses to the digital challenges of today's world.

New and emerging technologies, especially artificial intelligence, must be based on human control, technical reliability, security and robustness, appropriate data management, respect for privacy and the protection of personal data, transparency, and a clear definition of responsibilities.

A Global Digital Compact would set out the principles, objectives and actions to advance an open, free, secure and human-centered digital future, one that is anchored in universal human rights and that enables the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. In looking towards the UN Summit of the Future next year, this opportunity today is important for considering the challenges and identifying possible recommendations on concrete steps for a future where the governance of digital technologies is based on the human rights of everyone, everywhere.

Slovenia strives for a trustworthy, human-centered and human rights-based approach to the development and use of new and emerging technologies. The use of such technologies must fully respect human rights and fundamental freedoms that apply to both the physical and virtual worlds. We thus welcome the opportunity to discuss a proposal for a mechanism with international reach: the digital *Human Rights Advisory Mechanism* (HRAM), facilitated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his *Policy Brief on a Global Digital Compact*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Innovation must reflect universal human values, while contributing towards the protection of our planet and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. AI holds immense potential for our economies, societies and the planet. Applied well, AI can increase efficiency and support resource management, climate mitigation, disaster response and productive economic transformation. We should think about bending the arc of digital investment more towards solving societal problems and the shared global challenges. Digital innovations, if consciously applied, can help overcome the obstacles to progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, from addressing climate change to furthering gender equality.

When developing regulations or frameworks, we need to put specific measures in place to protect people and communities, in particular women, children, young and older persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people and ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. Data-fuelled surveillance, predatory business models, disinformation, hate speech, and malicious and criminal activity present in the digital sphere continue to pose serious risks to the enjoyment of human rights.

One of the particular concerns is the gender bias of the new technologies and AI. It is, for instance, interesting to observe how AI assistants such as Siri and Alexa tend to have female names and voices.

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am proud to note that Slovenia has a tradition and professional capacities in the field of new and emerging technologies such as AI. We are home to one of the oldest AI labs – the beginning of research in the field of AI in Slovenia dates back to 1972, when studies began at the Department of Computer Science at the Jožef Stefan Institute (IJS) in Ljubljana.

Moreover, Slovenia has the largest number of AI researchers per capita (1 per 7,000 inhabitants) in the world.

And since 2020, Slovenia has been host to the headquarters of the IRCAI – The International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence (the so-called UNESCO Centre II Category for AI), a coordination point, funding route and accelerator for approaches to the UN Sustainable Development Goals that make use of AI. We must make good use of all technology we have at our disposal, including AI, in order to accelerate much needed progress on the SDGs.