

**STATEMENT**  
by  
**Senator the Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith,**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade**  
at the  
**14<sup>th</sup> Global Governance Group (3G) Roundtable**  
on  
**“Closing the Digital Divide: From the Roadmap to the Common Agenda”**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 (2:00-3:00 p.m.)**

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Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends (GOF) on Digital Technologies  
Colleague Ministers,  
Excellencies,

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of digital transformation and perhaps more than ever, access to the Internet has proven critical not only for maintaining social ties, but for participating in an increasingly digitalized global economy. Simultaneously however, the pandemic has reinforced the digital divide, as well as widened economic, social and cultural inequalities among and within nations. As a result, there is a serious risk that we could fail to ensure universal connectivity by 2030, in line with the UN 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This reality is especially true for highly indebted, middle income countries (HIMICs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), like Jamaica.

### **National Context**

At the national level, the Government of Jamaica has been fully committed to bridging our internal ‘digital divide’. We have sought to mainstream universal digital inclusion within our **National Development Plan- Vision 2030**, which is aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Prior to the pandemic, we had already embarked on an ambitious agenda ensuring affordable universal access to information and communications technologies for industrial, commercial and residential users. We had been incrementally expanding the broadband network, upgrading critical ICT infrastructure, and implementing e-inclusion initiatives to increase affordable

access to computing devices for internet connectivity. The COVID-19 pandemic has now threatened to derail the pace of these efforts.

Amidst our severely reduced fiscal space, we are faced with the urgent challenge of speeding up broadband penetration to cover the entire island. As we begin the new school year, we are also challenged to provide equitable access to low-cost, reliable high-speed internet and computing devices and facilities for all students and educational and training institutions, to ensure that no child is left behind. In promoting greater inclusivity in the education sector, the Government of Jamaica has forged strong partnerships with our international development partners, the private sector and our Diaspora communities under a **'One Laptop or Tablet Per Child' Initiative** launched in 2020.

### **Colleagues,**

The reality is that these policies require financial resources. While the continued support of our traditional international development partners (IDPs) will be critical to accelerating these efforts, there is need to promote more innovative partnerships and synergies in development financing. These initiatives must meet the peculiar circumstances of the middle income developing countries, like Jamaica, which are already challenged with access to adequate concessional sustainable development financing. Moreover, we are being graduated from official development assistance (ODA) on the basis of GDP per capita, without regard to our peculiar vulnerabilities.

In this context, it is imperative that, we redouble our efforts to **strengthen international cooperation for digital capacity building**, in line with the *UN Secretary General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* launched in June 2020 and the *Common Agenda*.

### **Colleagues,**

We can all agree that mobilizing resources to bridge the digital divide will remain our greatest challenge even beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. As we examine the specific financing and international cooperation gaps, which must be addressed in overcoming the digital divide, we must include:

- First, scaling up financing mechanisms to **digitalize productive processes, develop new industries, and promote the creation of start-ups and SMEs in the technology sector in developing countries**. The Caribbean is unfortunately lagging behind most other regions in this regard. It is only through radical economic transformation that small and open economies like Jamaica, can keep pace with the rapid reorientation of global production. To do otherwise, we risk becoming increasingly marginalized from the digital economy and will struggle to get back on track to build back better.
- **Secondly, facilitating greater technology and knowledge transfer through increased South/South and Triangular cooperation**. There is significant scope for supporting our investment in digital skills development, through vocational training to empower our citizens to take advantage of global value chains within the expanding digital economy. In this way, we promote economic growth, job creation and sustainable recovery.
- Third, and finally, **international cooperation on digital capacity building must be needs-driven and tailored to national circumstances, structural gaps and priorities**. We recommit to promoting capacity building for digital inclusion as a central part of our journey towards sustainable development.

Excellencies,

In closing, it is my sincere hope that these ideas can help to guide our reflection on how we can better support the UN's efforts in bridging the digital divide. We have to continue to work to reduce inequalities within and among countries. Let us reaffirm our commitment to enhanced digital cooperation. Let us build an inclusive digital economy and promote universal access to digitally enabled services in line with our Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank you.

**Economic Affairs Department  
September 2021**