



# Speech of State Secretary Roberto Balzaretti at the ministerial conference «Close the Digital Divides: the Digital Response to COVID-19»

1 July 2020

Distinguished Ministers, dear Colleagues

It is a pleasure for me to address you today. I would like to **congratulate and thank Estonia and Singapore** for their initiative. The **Declaration** is a timely and comprehensive document, which Switzerland is happy to support.

In many countries, COVID19 is far from being over. Moreover, also in countries that are emerging from the crisis it is important that **societies become stronger and better prepared** for the future. Switzerland is deploying efforts to reduce the health, social and economic effects of COVID-19: at a national but also at an international scale, namely in countries which are more vulnerable.

Digitalization is generally an important development engine. It can also be a **powerful tool** in making societies more resilient against crisis.

In order to be effective and accessible for all, digitalization has to be promoted and implemented under certain conditions: we need to take into account aspects such as human rights and fundamental freedoms. The **protection of personal data**, for instance, is a fundamental aspect, which requires the implementation of secure solutions. In addition, we need to be transparent and inclusive: our populations need to understand and, if possible, co-shape, this process. In other words: we have **to put individuals in control of digitalization**, in order to obtain their acceptance.

With regard to the current crisis, this means that measures implemented by States to address the COVID-19 pandemic have to be **secure** and compliant with **international human rights law** and standards.

Allow me to give an example: the **proximity-tracing app** which was developed in Switzerland to stem the spread of COVID-19. The app works with a source code that is openly available. It has been tested by many security experts for one month. The app relies on Bluetooth and a decentralized storage of keys. It does not enable anyone to track the movements made by its users.

These features have been thoroughly and successfully explained to our population: within four days, we have reached over 10 percent penetration. We are currently trying to ensure that the App can be used internationally alongside similar devices (so called interoperability).

We very much support the focus put on “**international, multilateral and multi-stakeholder**” collaboration

emphasized in the **Declaration**. Indeed, we have many stakeholders on board: civil society, academia, the public and private sector as well as international institutions such as The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Human Rights Council, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, and the International Telecommunication Union.

We are convinced that this broad cooperation will enable our societies to emerge stronger from this crisis.

Concerning the private sector, Switzerland has launched the “Geneva Dialogue on Responsible Behaviour in Cyberspace”. Our aim is to develop best practices in terms of digital security for private companies all over the world.

The **UN Secretary General** has underlined the need for more effective multi-stakeholder collaboration when he presented his Roadmap on Digital Cooperation three weeks ago. Switzerland strongly supports his ambition to create a more effective and inclusive digital governance architecture. We are convinced that the idea of an “**Internet Governance Forum Plus**” will have the best chance to invigorate the global digital governance. Switzerland will continue to work with you and all relevant actors in this regard.

Thank you.