

**Opening of the Board Meeting and
Workshop of the International
Association of Economic and Social
Councils & Similar Institutions (AICESIS)
Atrium of the Renaissance Curacao
7 March 2019**

Statement by H.E. Eugene Rhuggenaath,
Prime Minister of Curaçao

Mr. President of the International Association of Economic
and Social Councils and Similar Institutions,

Mr. acting President of the Economic and Social Council of
Curaçao,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

Bonjour,

Buenos Dias,

Buna Dimineata (Romanian pronounced: buna dimi-nata),

Bon dia,

It gives me great honor and pleasure to officially welcome you, on behalf of the Government and the people of Curaçao, to our beautiful island which was chosen by the General Assembly of your prestigious association to host this year's Board Meeting and Workshop. For this unique opportunity, we are very honored, proud and grateful.

I wish to commend the Presidency of AICESIS on its choice regarding the main theme of this session, as this is a question that some are already asking themselves, but in fact is a question everyone should be asking themselves:

“What does the Digital Revolution really mean for us?”

This is a theme that is currently being deliberated in various international forums such as the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the World Economic Forum and The International Labor Organization (ILO) 'Global Commission on The Future of Work' and also here locally; and with good reason, as various people are worried about the consequences of this new digital era, such as the loss of jobs as a consequence of tasks becoming obsolete due to automation, digitalization and artificial intelligence. Some people are fortunate to find an alternative job, however at times this job pays less. Others are not as fortunate and remain displaced.

Other setbacks can be felt as new technologies are only available to the wealthy, which could further exclude the most vulnerable. This exclusion can only become greater as our society becomes increasingly more dependent on digital technology, as data is taking over as the most valuable resource; for decision-making, market intelligence, innovation and maintaining a competitive edge.

This dark side to technological change has also been addressed by the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres when he stated that *“Technology has a great potential to help deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, but it can also be the root of exclusion and inequality. We need to harness the benefits of advanced technologies for all”*.

And this, last phrase, is what I would love to hear your ideas on: harnessing the benefits of technology for everyone, meaning leaving no one behind.

Please allow me to offer some initial ideas on this. Firstly, we should steer technological change in a sustainable direction. This can be done by scaling up innovations that drive positive change in society. This would also require proper coordination as there will be no shortage of tech companies and other stakeholders that can provide for ideas and solutions. It is therefore important that as societies we need to collaborate and to use ‘collective intelligence’, involving all stakeholders and citizens from the beginning. This, in my view, is important to create a common understanding and mutual trust.

The digital revolution is not going to stop. Therefore, we need solutions to make sure that everyone can develop and that will empower and enable progress for all. Solutions must be drafted for the current workforce, such as the re-skilling and improving versatility. In addition, our younger generation needs to be prepared, taking courses in line with the new developments. We must also create awareness among our youth as some of the jobs that they may know (today) and want to do, may not exist in the future. While at the same time, their dream job might not yet even exist.

The digital revolution is not all bad, as the Secretary General mentioned: there is great potential as well. Technology might help to minimize inequality by providing better access to basic services, such as online education. It can also be used by governments to better connect with their citizens through e-government tools, such as our Bentana di Informashon and soon to be launched Forti Habrí (Open Government platform) to improve stakeholder engagement and information sharing.

The digital age can also be a key enabler to boost connectivity and prevent isolation, for example for the elderly and physically challenged. Though I must say that at times, when everyone in my home is on their devices, I am the one who feels isolated.

Digital technology is fortunately also well-integrated into the 2030 Agenda. The most obvious example is SDG 9, which entails industry, innovation and infrastructure. There is, however, a well-established understanding that digital technology can help drive the progress for all goals. For instance, SDG 9, on affordable and clean energy, needs digital technology to integrate renewable energy sources and to digitize manufacturing processes. When reviewing SDG 11, on sustainable cities and communities, one can explore the potential of smart cities, in which the combination of digital connectivity, data, and citizen knowledge generates opportunities for public services to become better adapted to the needs of populations and in this improving quality of life. SDG 12, on responsible consumption and production, can be connected to social

and environmental repercussions of the information and communication technology (ICT) and smartphone industry, such as the generation of e-waste and the labor conditions in the extraction of minerals that digital devices are made of, and thy taking strides to a more socially environmentally responsible and circular economy (with zero waste).

Mr. President,

Distinguished guests,

Let us together, in a collaborative way, unleash the full potential and real power of digitalization and turn the digital society we are shaping, into an opportunity for everyone, where indeed *no one will be left behind*.

Thank you, masha danki (as we say in our native language Papiamentu) and I wish you all a very productive meeting today and a fruitful exchange of ideas and best practices in the interest of us all during the workshop tomorrow. I look forward to the outcome. Let us harness technology and ‘minecraft’ a better future for all.