

Opening Remarks
Didier Trebucq
Digital Readiness Assessment Workshop
Antigua and Barbuda
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Hon Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of A&B
- Hon. Melford Nicholas, Minister of Information Communications Technologies (ICTs), Utilities and Energy
- PS and Senior government officials
- Heads of UN Agencies, and other UN Representatives
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon

I am really thrilled to join you to launch today's Digital Readiness Assessment Workshop. As it reflects the forward thinking of the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda.

This workshop is timely as **digital technologies have advanced more rapidly than any innovation in our history – reaching around 50 per cent of the developing world's population in only two decades and transforming societies.**

I therefore wish to commend the Antigua and Barbuda Government vision for prioritizing digitalization as a national priority and for recognizing the game changing contributions digitalization brings to accelerate sustainable development.

When Prime Minister you shared your vision for a digital Antigua and Barbuda recently and asked me for our UN technical assistance, as UN System was delighted to respond, **with UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, PAHO, and ITU quickly mobilized to develop a digitalization framework.** Thank them for their responsiveness and commitments so far.

At the UN we are fully supportive of this Government's aspiration to create a digital Antigua and Barbuda, through the **deployment of digital infrastructure and services that reaches all citizens, residents, and visitors to support their livelihoods and wellbeing.**

Today's Digital Readiness Assessment is a key milestone for realizing this important vision. Following this critical survey exercise will be several activities, that will culminate in a digital transformation framework, providing the Government with specific projects to be implemented.

As UNST, we are committed to supporting Caribbean Governments to enhance digital transformation in key sectors including agriculture, MSMEs, education, justice and environment. On disaster management, the UN also is to launch the early warning for All initiative in A&B which is backed up by digital solutions.

Here in Antigua and Barbuda, a Digital Transformation Unit was installed in the Education Planning Department; and through a 5-year partnership

with USAID, UNDP supported digitization of Police Records Management Information Systems in **80% of police stations across the region, including in Antigua.**

It is clear that digitalization is at the heart of development.

By enhancing connectivity, financial inclusion, access to trade and public services, technology can be a great equalizer.

The COVID pandemic undoubtedly highlighted the importance of digital technologies, when during the crisis, school, work and major services ground to a complete halt.

Even after the immediate threat has diminished, the utility of digital technologies remains. Enrollment in online education is today at an all-time high, compared to pre-pandemic levels, with demand increasing from 300,000 to 220 million. The need to accelerate the transition to a digital economy with the private sector is also an imperative to remain competitive.

Antigua and Barbuda is not alone in its digital ambition, with the demand for digital technologies skyrocketing between 2020 and 2022.

Governments are today seeking more comprehensive national digital transformation strategies to drive innovation and ensure benefits for all.

In fact Digital Readiness Assessments were also supported in Dominica, Grenada and BVI, and development of National Digital Transformation and Digital Agriculture Strategies in Dominica, Barbados and St. Kitts and Nevis.

Despite being a powerful resource with tremendous benefits, the UN Secretary General has, also warned that digitalization can also be a great divider. **A ‘global commitment for digital cooperation’ is a key recommendation by the SG’s High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation.**

To this end, the UNDS is recommending the use of an inclusive, whole of society approach to digital transformation, to support governments in their holistic approach to policy planning and design.

Congratulation to Antigua and Barbuda for taking such a decisive and forward looking step; you can count on the UN to help you develop optimal strategies and plans for digital transformation, for everyone’s benefits.