Opening Remarks of International Telecommunications Society (ITS) Chair, Stephen Schmidt, for ITS webinar, Internet Fragmentation, Reconsidered with Andrew Sullivan, 6 February 2023

Welcome!

Thank you for being here today!

We are joined today by members of the International Telecommunications Society (ITS) family spanning Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Americas.

We are grateful to everyone that has chosen to invest their time and attention with us today.

An extra shout out to those joining us from time zones where it is quite late right now (Asia) or quite early right now (on the West side of North America).

The International Telecommunications Society (ITS) is a neutral forum and meeting place where scholars, policy practitioners, and members of industry come together to discuss and explore the most timely and pressing issues in communications policy, in a spirit of friendship and scholarship.

Today's webinar is the first ITS webinar of 2023 and our 17th webinar since the onset of the pandemic.

Today's webinar considers the issue of Internet fragmentation and its influence on global connectivity.

Today's webinar:

The origins of the Internet are rooted in the idea (and ideal) of a global network of networks, connecting people and information across borders and cultures.

There has been impressive progress towards this ideal.

However, in recent years, we have seen a shift towards "Internet fragmentation" arising from various sources including government policies, technological change and commercial practices.

On the one hand, Internet fragmentation creates barriers to access, limits innovation, and may exacerbate existing inequalities.

On other hand, Internet fragmentation can be potentially justified, on various grounds, including as a way to protect vulnerable populations (minors, for example), protect IP rights, build safer proprietary networks, and comply with local laws.

The complex nature of Internet fragmentation leaves regulators with a series of deep and difficult questions, including:

- How does the way we define and conceptualize Internet fragmentation affect regulatory and political action in response?

- What values (and *whose* values) should guide regulators in their approach to Internet fragmentation?

- How can regulators balance the potential benefits of some fragmentation without compromising the development of a global network of networks?

Today's speaker:

We have a distinguished speaker joining us today who is uniquely qualified to speak to these issues:

Mr. Andrew Sullivan:

- President and CEO of the Internet Society,
- Long-standing advocate of the Internet as an interoperable and neutral platform,
- will provide us with his thoughts on the consequential issue of Internet fragmentation.

For organizing this webinar, I would like to thank:

- Our speaker, Andrew Sullivan.

- Our academic host, Ivey Business School at Western University – *a new academic host* for ITS and *a new home* for our very distinguished ITS colleague and friend, Dr. Erik Bohlin, who has joined the Ivey Business School as their inaugural *Chair in Telecommunications Economics, Policy and Regulation.*

- Our corporate host, TELUS Communications and our ITS corporate members who make these important conversations possible

- Our ITS board members, Dr. Sandy Levin and Dr. Erik Bohlin, and

- And all of you who have joined today! We look forward to your questions, comments and insights and we will leave a generous amount of time for dialogue.

Enjoy!

Stephen Schmidt
ITS Chair