Infopoverty Grand Conversation
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Opening Remarks by Pierpaolo Saporito
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Welcome to the Grand Conversation, the first part of the 21st Infopoverty World Conference running at the UN Headquarters since 2001.

We now see the epochal turnover that Covid is imposing on our world, and that requests more engagement to contribute to build the incumbent Digital Society. The recrudescence of the virus and the simultaneous acceleration of the digital revolution has moved us from the real world in danger into a virtual one, where sociality can continue and logistics did not lose its effectiveness. This state of necessity made us discover how many opportunities the new digital technologies have opened and how wide and accessible our world has become, open to everyone who was before excluded, by distance or by language. The entire human population is now potentially connected and could be equipped with devices that allow working also through free videoconference, thus cancelling distance and time, unifying the languages.

However, at the moment, more than half of the population does not have access to digital tools, so poverty suffers from new forms of marginalization. The largest diffusion of digital practices, provided by the Covid emergency, offers new tools for sustainable development, and could help reduce poverty.

Nobody now wants to go back to old practices. The ancient regime is over. New solutions are welcome, and we need to keep an open mind to face these challenges.

Linking the elderly with millennials and young people, to empower skills able to confront the complexity of increasing socio-economic global systems, creating new paradigms, and solutions to the basic needs.

It is the time to build.

How? And who are the masters of this change?

Firstly, the great companies have already placed the basics of digital languages, logistics, relations, financial and governmental procedures, and the main telecommunication infrastructures. Until now they have built this new digital environment for their own profit, oriented to wealthy people, and neglecting the large mass of poor. This status of inequality must end, because if you leave behind such a mass of people, political instability grows and society collapses.

We need to analyse critically the matrix of the digital environment in terms of participation and inclusion. The great mobilization to tackle climate change has achieved wide popularity. We need to apply the same attention to the virtual environment, in order to preserve it from the risks

of deprivation of our privacy, of freedom of expression, contrasting the control, manipulations, fake news, false identificationé

Enlarging the access to all and cleaning up the web is a priority. We must come out of this seemingly medieval land, riddled with marauders, where safety is constantly under threat, tolls and access codes are required to enter the new closed dukedoms, feudal system of barons, each governed by their own *ad excludendum* laws, profiling everyone, trying a kind of mass robotization.

This new virtual world requires clear governance and tutelage in order to guarantee free circulation, transparency, affordability and rules for platforms, algorithms, calculation centres, storage, codesé

Whoever leads this virtual territory, leads the planet.

This mechanism of innovations is out of our control, either driven by private interests or by remote group of power. People play the role of consumers according to what is offered, but they are out of this solipsistic and unstable process.

In this momentum, we need to understand how to clarify these basic aspects in order to contribute to build the incoming Society, elaborating proposals, searching new guidelines and alliances, encompassing all fields: energy, medicine, space exploration, climate change, food insecurity, productions, migrations, etc.

The United Nations, with the SDGs and the Agenda 2030, have drawn a holistic strategy of the dynamics in act, orienting actions towards clear and achievable objectives.

A great regenerative convergence of awareness and competence is necessary, in order to extend the practical benefits of the Digital Revolution in action to all, avoiding the risks and ensuring global access, sharing knowledge, creating digital services for providing basic e-welfare for all, in terms of education, health, food security governance, empowered by an adequate AI, driven by a large democratic participation, under the aegis of the UN.

This dawning society is rising dense with promises. It is our duty to contribute to build it positively.

The task of the Conversation is to collect ideas and proposals to be part of the Report committed to be presented at the UN Headquarters during the 21st Infopoverty World Conference, on 3 December 2021.

To do that, we thank the participants for sharing their visons to continue their collaboration in the form of a Network of Digital Builders, which will elaborate the Report and will merge in the UN System, enhancing its capacity to drive the process to achieve the SDGs accelerating the advent of a fairer and inclusive Digital Society, universal and with a common language and law.