

Innovators, UN discuss using tech to tackle world's development challenges

17 May 2017 – From drones dropping food and medicines, to handheld devices that can diagnose Ebola with a drop of blood, the latest technological advances are converging to make the “unthinkable happen,” said global innovators and heads of tech companies invited to the United Nations today to discuss how emerging technologies can boost achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Living up to his promise to be “disruptive,” a famous Silicon Valley catchphrase, Peter Thomson, the President of the UN General Assembly told those gathered for the High-level [SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity](#) that he had refrained from wearing a tie, while Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed kicked off her shoes before addressing the room.

“Today, in this world, everyone is closing their border,” she said, but partnerships are necessary for the [SDGs](#) to reach every corner of the globe. Indeed, many innovators know no borders, “like we do in these halls when we negotiate and we talk about red lines, blue lines and green lines.”

Ms. Mohammed underscored: “There are no red, blue or green lines as you walk through the Internet, social media, communicating across those borders. That is what is exciting. Because with that you can share knowledge, with that you can go to scale, with that you can partner to de-risk environments where ordinarily you would not go.”

The Action Event, which sought to get leading innovators from major global corporations to interact with UN Member States, [featured](#) two keynote speakers, with Dr. Peter Diamandis, Chairman of XPrize Foundation and Singularity University, telling the gathering that he believed that in seven years, the entire planet will be connected.

This is what he called the “dematerialization” of things that people used to own, and that are now free on our cell phones.

VIDEO: Speaking at the General Assembly’s High-level SDG Action Event, leading innovators from major corporations interacted with UN Member States on how emerging technologies can transform efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

“The son or daughter of a billionaire here in Manhattan, or the son or daughter of the poorest person in Kenya, has access to the same free applications, the same knowledge and information. It’s an incredible world. What we are seeing here is a dematerialization as all of these things become cheaper and cheaper and ultimately, a democratization where we have a billion

handsets in Africa.”

Mr. Diamandis then asked participants to imagine the power of five billion new minds that had never been connected before.

“Change the world,” was his response.

The second keynote speaker, Astro Teller, Chief Executive Officer of Google Ex, said partnerships between inventors, technologists, governments and local communities are what matter the most.

The majority of 7.5 billion people living on the planet do not have access to the internet, he remarked.



General Assembly President Peter Thomson speaks at the High-level SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity. UN Photo/Evan Schneider



Astro Teller, CEO of Google X, speaks at the High-level SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity. UN Photo/Evan Schneider



Peter Diamandis, Chairman of the XPrize Foundation and Singularity University, speaks at the High-level SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

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“This is a picture in Brazil. There are so many people who climb up the trees in order to get cell phone signal that they call them fireflies because at night, all you can see in the darkness is all of the flashing lights of the cell phones high up in the trees as they are hoping to get a signal. In Peru, they climb to the top of water towers or walk for many kilometres for the hope of getting a signal,” he said.

In order to get more people online, Google Ex launched a balloon-powered Internet project, Loon, in Latin America with the help of the UN International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Partnering, Mr. Teller stressed, is important for everyone, from the innovator to Governments. “No one can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals alone.”