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UGRA STATEMENT

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Final document of the V International Conference "Tangible and Intangible Impact of Information and Communication in the Digital Age"

The V International Conference "Tangible and Intangible Impact of Information and Communication in the Digital Age" took place in Khanty-Mansiysk (Russian Federation) on June 6–8, 2023, within the framework of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP) and the XIV International IT Forum.

The Conference followed the line of analysing the expected and unanticipated consequences, both positive and negative, of the introduction and deployment of digital technologies with a view to enabling the elaboration of optimal science-based policies in various spheres of human life and activities. Special focus was placed on the most essential issues of information society development which have acquired a particular relevance in 2023:

- impact of breakthrough information technology (IT) on the society, decision-making and everyday life,
- challenges of cybersecurity and IT use for public welfare,
- specific aspects of public administration in the Digital Universe,
- safety compliance of using generative models,
- ethical framework for actions and decisions of artificial intelligence (AI) systems,
- copyright protection and intellectual property management in the context of digital transformation,
- new challenges entailed by the use of AI in creative works,
- using IT in intellectual creative outputs,
- regional experience in the development of creative industries, existing and potential support measures,
- international experience in the development of digital language resources and other applications of IT for the preservation and promotion of languages in the digital space.

Conference participants agreed that the key socio-cultural aspects of digital transformation processes, as described in the Ugra Communiqué "Information and Communication in the Digital Age" (2022), remain relevant, but their comprehension is being influenced by dramatic political events, the increasingly aggravating crisis of the existing world order and the intensification of global challenges.

Participants also affirmed that the conference should continue to serve as a platform for open, honest and mutually respectful dialog and cooperation, even at a time of sharp escalation of contradictions.

Conference participants emphasised the following:

1. There has been a significant increase in the level of general awareness and in the number of diverse public and professional discussions related to the development of digital technologies and the ethics of their use in education, science, media and other spheres, as well as their impact on various aspects of life. The topic of massive adoption of large generative models such as GPT3 and GPT4 has become front and centre, and, against this background, other advanced technologies have not been given the attention they deserve.

2. We are witnessing a shift in the public comprehension of new technologies. The previously dominant vision of technology as a problem-solving tool is being replaced by its intensifying perception as a source of problems, at least in the context of today's widespread adoption of technology without considering the consequences and possible dangers. Technology is becoming a driver of increased physical and information security risks, and governments, which do not always receive timely and adequate information on the status of technological developments by private companies and depend on them to a large extent, are unable to mitigate these emerging risks.

3. Due to economic and other constraints, many of the world's languages cannot keep pace with the rapid development of modern linguistic computer technology and AI, and as a result are simply being neglected. To date, only a few major languages can boast of truly wide technological opportunities, while the needs of other languages have not been adequately addressed. As a result, the introduction of AI technologies poses risks of linguistic and cultural homogenisation, jeopardising the very existence of minority languages and cultural diversity.

4. The convergence of digital technologies with cognitive and neuroscience increases the relevance and intensity of discussions on whether humanity will retain the ability to determine its own future. Governance, regulatory frameworks, labor markets, business models, education and professional development systems, health care, creative industries, and many other critical areas of information processing come under threat. While in the previous stages of digital transformation of public administration the transparency of decision-making used to increase, today we see an alarming trend towards its dramatic decrease.

5. Ever-evolving and increasingly complex technologies of AI as an unpredictable actor radically increase the level of uncertainty about the future, undermining any insights and plans related to sustainability.

6. The extremely competitive technology race launched by the largest technology companies and governments of almost all developed nations, especially in the field of generative AI, is growing into a global digital confrontation. This technological race is pursued in the context of continuing dominance of an economic model based on the total involvement of humans in interaction with technologies and devices penetrating into all spheres of life. It inevitably conduces to the control and management of people's perception and behavior, which are becoming increasingly automated and carried out by technological agents rather than by other people.

Based on the above, the Conference encourages all stakeholders to make efforts to implement the provisions of the Ugra Declaration (2018), Ugra Resolution (2019), Ugra Memorandum (2021) and Ugra Communiqué (2022) adopted under the general title "Information and Communication in the Digital Age", focusing on the following issues:

a. Since the challenges posed by the development of pervasive digital technologies are common for humankind, a unifying framework is required for increased cooperation among all States. Systemic study of the impact of digital technologies on different social groups, industries and sectors should engage not only academics but also practitioners.

b. Particular efforts should be focused on reducing the gap between research and development in the area of technology capabilities on the one hand, and ensuring their safety and monitoring the processes of their use on the other hand. There is a strong need for systematic development of research areas related to understanding and interpreting the performance of AI systems and improving machine learning methods based on "embedded" safety. Oversight of technology companies dealing with research in biology, genetics, and autonomous weapons development should be particularly scrutinised.

c. Applying risk-based trials of mass use of technologies on a global scale, as is already being done, for example, prior to mass introduction of new medications in medicine and pharmacology, can help improve safety and reasonably reduce the pace of technological development. This is particularly the case for assessing the social impact of the introduction of AI technologies.

d. In critical areas where the possibility of error could have fatal consequences, technologies should not be allowed to operate autonomously without human oversight and verification.

e. While developing AI technologies, particular attention should be paid to basic ethical principles enshrined in national and international documents, including the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.

f. The right to informational realism, as the human right to get reliable information about what is happening in the world, must be protected at all times. Additional efforts should be made, on the one hand, to reduce inaccurate and false information fostered by AI technologies and to increase human control over the dissemination and use of data generated in the process of interaction with digital systems, and, on the other hand, to improve the level of media and information literacy of each individual, thus enhancing human agency and subjectivity.

g. Digitalisation of management processes and document flow should provide for a balance of digital and analogue access to services and products in public services.

h. Generative AI also exacerbates contradictions related to the protection of copyright and intellectual property. Regulation in this area should be based on the primacy of the right to creativity and the right of access to creative products, which could be facilitated by the development of a supranational mechanism for implementing legal decisions to counteract copyright and intellectual property infringements on digital platforms.

i. Given that most generative AI models have been developed for English, it is necessary to carefully analyse to which extent these models can understand and generate texts in

other languages. Developers of digital technologies and AI systems should assess the sociocultural implications of their deployment and seek to adapt and localise technologies to different languages in order to support linguistic and cultural diversity as a key to inclusivity and an important factor in achieving sustainable development.

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The V International Conference "Tangible and Intangible Impact of Information and Communication in the Digital Age" has become a follow-up to four previous international conferences under the same title, which were held with great success in Khanty-Mansiysk in 2018-2022, received a wide resonance and set the context for further discussions.

The V Anniversary Conference was traditionally organised by the Russian UNESCO IFAP Committee, the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre and the Government of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Ugra with the support of the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO, the Permanent Delegation of the Russian Federation to UNESCO and the UNESCO IFAP Intergovernmental Council.

The event gathered about 150 experts from 48 countries – representatives of intergovernmental, international, regional and national non-governmental organisations, public authorities, prominent Russian and foreign experts in communication, information technologies, information security, creative industries, management, international relations, sociology, political science, psychology, linguistics, pedagogy.

All conference participants confirmed that the Government of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Ugra (Russian Federation) and personally Ugra Governor Natalia Komarova deserve sincere and heartfelt gratitude for their unwavering and invaluable support, allowing for five years of unprecedented interdisciplinary discussions on various aspects of the impact of rapid technological progress on the individual, society and the state.

The V International Conference "Tangible and Intangible Impact of Information and Communication in the Digital Age" was dedicated to the memory of Evgeny Kuzmin, the initiator and main organiser of this series of conferences, permanent head of the Russian UNESCO IFAP Committee and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the UNESCO IFAP Intergovernmental Council. It is due to his energy, intellect, will and authority that an international network of concerned experts in science, education, media, digital technologies, governance, representatives of civil society has been built and, in five years, the conference has raised a high level of comprehension and discussion of the impact of digital technologies on people and society. For all conference participants Evgeny Kuzmin's passing is an irreparable loss.