Warm greetings from the Office of the Counselor for Information Technologies and Communications of the General Secretariat at City Hall Bogotá. I take the opportunity to congratulate Medellin for hosting the 7th edition of the World Urban Forum 2014, which is celebrated under the guidance of UN Habitat.

I intend to present from the policy perspective of Information Technologies and Communications –ICT- the major initiatives undertaken at the Mayor's Office in order to promote social inclusion and improve the quality of life of people in Bogotá.

Today ICTs are present in almost all the activities of society; it is the revolution of our time, as the printing press was in its time. However, the adoption of these new technologies by citizens achieves full extent when they are positioned from the social perspective. To this end, ICTs must be understood not only as a means, but also as a factor in changing citizen’s behavior and cultural transformation.

Just as "Better public space relieves social conflict", as expressed by Christian Werthmann, a German specialist in urban issues, we can also say that better access, use and application of ICTs, relieves social exclusion. Moreover, overcoming social exclusion, one of the great challenges of our society also involves overcoming digital exclusion. In the era of information and communication technologies, digital inclusion is crucial for social inclusion!

With this vision, in 2012 was incorporated in the development plan of the city, for the first time in the history of Bogotá, an entire chapter dedicated to access, use and application of ICTs. I refer to the Development Plan "For a Humane Bogotá", presented by the Administration of Gustavo Petro and approved by the City Council of Bogotá, in which three axles are articulated: overcoming social segregation, strengthening public finances and adapting the city to climate change. In 2013 was established in the Territorial Ordinance Plan new issues related to technology infrastructure in the Capital District, a city which now has over 8 million inhabitants. For 2014, we are working on the development of an ICT Master Plan for Bogotá. In all of this, always guided by our motto: ICT for human goals!

In a globalized digital world, citizen access to the information society must be addressed as a new emerging right. Just as important in urban life as is access to better health services, better roads, better security, also too is access to the information society. In the same way that For a Humane Bogota established as a right, the minimum vital water consumption, so too is elevated to the status of law, basic access to the information society. In this direction is aimed our program of WI-FI zones in the 20 localities of Bogotá: we have installed 50 zones of free Internet access in parks, pedestrian corridors and public spaces, where more than 800 thousand users were
connected in 2013. More recently we have implemented public Wi-Fi in stations and terminals of Transmilenio, the mass transit system in Bogotá, and will soon be launching an invitation to the public to propose new Wi-Fi zones in the territories of the city.

Public access should not be seen as an issue of antennas and cables, but as an initiative to guarantee citizens the right of access to basic information society. Moreover, from a holistic perspective, public access must be part of a package of measures also aimed at revitalizing urban Wi-Fi and the cultural appropriation of public spaces in these areas by the citizens. We're talking about a public policy of planning and urban management.

In 2013, the Ciudad Bolivar Locality Digital program enabled digital literacy for 31,000 adults, conducted in October and the ICT Month, an unprecedented initiative in the world, with more than 160 activities across the city for a month. These projects, among others, also form part of a policy of social appropriation of ICTs by the General Secretariat of the Mayor’s Office of Bogotá, implemented through the office of the ICT Counselor.

In recent days, we learned of the troubling results by students in Colombia in the international PISA tests. We wonder how the social appropriation of ICTs in education can help young people become more able to solve the problems of everyday life. If we want a profound renewal of teaching in public education, virtual education is a crucial factor to energize and transform classroom education. Therefore, in 2013, together with the Ministry of Education, and the Bogotá Telecommunications Company, as the operator endowed 430 educational centers with fiber optic connectivity to the Internet, reaching more than 600,000 students. At the same time, we are placing Wi-Fi in about 4000 classrooms of those institutions. Bogotá is the first city in the country to have 70% of its public educational establishments connected to the information superhighway. Giving tablets to public schools, deploying virtual educational content and developing training programs for teachers to incorporate new innovative forms of education are the next challenges in which the Mayor’s Office of Bogotá is working.

Let’s look, on the other hand, at the opportunities offered by the innovative use of ICTs to promote social behavioral changes towards greater citizen participation in urban life. The city belongs to all the actors who form part of it. Its spaces, its services, its habitat, are not the responsibility of the institutions, so too are its citizens. Better interaction between institutions and improving public citizenship. A city is more sustainable to the extent that its various citizenships appropriate the city and act in favor public life, all of which today can be promoted and boosted through innovative and intelligent use of ICTs.

Take for example: smart city applications for mobile phones, in a city where there is nearly one cell phone for every inhabitant over 15 years of age. These applications allow citizens to report and geo-reference in real time road network issues, waste disposal, mobility, security and other urban problems. Such is the case of the application launched by the Water and Sewerage Company of Bogotá to report sewers without lids. There is also the "BogotáPiensaTIC" competition of this year, instituted by the office of the ICTs Counselor in which 200 smart city projects were presented.

I draw your attention to the dual role here played by new technologies, in particular ICTs: on the one hand are a means to enable and facilitate interactions between citizens and public institutions, in this case for the improvement of the urban habitat and on the other hand, can be an agent of change for social and institutional behaviors.
Indeed, in order to generalize the use of these smart city applications requires a change in citizen social responsibility and institutional responses, but also using these means causes changes and produces feedback from citizens and the institutional culture.

This topic of the new opportunities offered by ICTs for citizen participation in public life and the transformation of public life is part of a wider field: the contribution of the digital era to strengthen the Government and Democratic Governance in cities. I refer to Online Government and new virtual scenarios for the exercise of citizen democracy. It is a multidisciplinary field of great interest.

I will end my contribution to this panel by mentioning two significant events in 2013: Medellín won the award for the "Most Innovative City" in the world organized by a Wall Street Journal contest, and Bogotá won third place in Latin America in the ranking of "Smart Cities" behind Santiago and Mexico City, undertaken by the publication Fast Company. Both events invite the two cities to work hand in hand, along with other cities in Colombia and the world, to make urban living a more humane, friendly and sustainable place. This is the challenge of the future.

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