JOINT COUNCIL DECLARATION ON THE 1ST COUNCIL MEETING OF THE
DIGITAL COOPERATION ORGANIZATION
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

1. We, the Ministers representing the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the State of Kuwait, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, met virtually on April 12, 2021, to agree upon the Strategic Roadmap, organizational structure and the governance model of the Digital Cooperation Organization (“DCO” or “the Organization”). At the same time, we would like to announce and formally welcome the accession of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Sultanate of Oman as members of the Organization.

GOVERNANCE

2. We resolve that the headquarters of the Organization will be established in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The inaugural presidency will be assumed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia until December 31, 2022. The General Secretariat will be led by Ms. Deemah Al Yahya as its first Secretary General for a term of four years.

3. To collaboratively, transparently, and effectively align the efforts of the member states, observers, and non-member partners of the DCO and ensure the efficient and sustainable operations of the Organization, we have agreed upon the Governance Guidebook. We affirm that the DCO’s activities will be governed by three principal bodies - the Council, the General Secretariat, and the Digital Space Accelerators. We have also agreed on the initial organizational structure and discussed the proposed DCO financing model.

THE DCO SHARED DIGITAL SPACE AND INITIATIVES

4. To advance our national digital transformations, promote the inclusive development of the digital economy, and address the long-term challenges posed by the global pandemic, we reaffirm our intent to complement our national efforts with a collaborative, multilateral approach to advancing our shared interests in the digital space. To accomplish this, we intend to create in the DCO a shared digital space through collaboration in key digital areas. The work of the DCO will include a focus on collaborative policy, regulatory, strategic efforts and supporting events and initiatives within each collaboration area.

5. DIGITAL INCLUSION AND BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE. We firmly believe that the inclusion of women, youth, and entrepreneurs is critical to accelerating the digital transformation of our nations, and to promoting the innovation and growth of the digital economy. We therefore commit to taking concerted action to enable these groups to flourish in the digital economy. As a first step, we resolve to create the DCO Observatory for Digital Empowerment, which will focus on tracking key indicators to assess the state of the
digital inclusion of these groups, form recommendations to close identified gaps, and act as an ombudsman to promote fairer treatment of these groups across DCO member states.

6. DATA FLOWS AND TRUST. Businesses are increasingly relying on the availability of high-quality data as an engine and enabler of growth and innovation. The DCO will therefore work to facilitate the data pooling across members, making valuable information more accessible to businesses. We also recognize the increasing need to enhance interoperability of cross-border data flow regulatory frameworks. To achieve this, we commit to update our frameworks, while maintaining the privacy standards of each DCO member state. To advance our work on an accelerated basis, we will establish a DCO Center of Excellence for Data Flows to support development of effective governance.

7. BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT STIMULATION AND SUPPORT. Given the vital role of (M)SMEs and start-ups at the heart of our digital economies as vital engines of innovation, growth, and employment, we commit to increase their market access through reducing barriers to their cross-border growth within the DCO. In the near term, we will develop DCO (M)SME Market Expansion Primers to provide our (M)SMEs with information to facilitate the identification and pursuit of opportunities in the DCO member states.

8. DIGITAL ECONOMY ASSESSMENT. To drive measurable progress toward our digital transformation objectives, we recognize the need to effectively monitor the advancement of the digital economy. We will therefore develop the DCO Digital Economy Maturity Index, in partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which will highlight areas requiring improvements and support and guide decision makers in identifying initiatives that will contribute toward the growth of the digital economy. Additionally, we will establish an award program to reward those entities and individuals that contribute significantly to advancing the growth of the digital economy.

WAY FORWARD

9. To achieve these objectives, we will follow a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach, considering the perspectives of all member states, businesses, and international organizations. We will ensure that our activities are aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of which they are a part. We agree that the next full Council meeting of the DCO will take place in 2022, at which we will discuss the progress in implementing our initiatives and review their early impact on the achievement of our objectives.