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WITSA Announces Policy Recommendations to Narrow the Gap in Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Fairfax, VA: The World Information Technology and Services Alliance today published a statement of policy entitled “ICT Leadership in Inclusive Employment of Persons with Disabilities: An Economic and Social Imperative”. The paper was developed in cooperation with SourceAmerica® - a Vienna, Virginia based non-profit organization that is a leading U.S. source of job opportunities for people with significant disabilities. In keeping with WITSA’s mission to be the leader in Fulfilling the Promise of the Digital Age for everyone, this paper and accompanying policy recommendations address the social and economic imperatives of employment of persons with disabilities and lay out a roadmap for the ICT industry to grow as leaders in supporting the employment of persons with disabilities.

Of the 7.8 billion people worldwide, nearly 1 in 6 are persons with disabilities, a group disproportionately underrepresented in the economy. Worldwide, persons with disabilities face barriers to economic and social participation, including employment. Advancements in accessible and assistive technologies are critical and must expand to cover the broad diversity of disability. Economically, it is estimated that countries forego up to 7 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to the exclusion of persons with disabilities. Employing persons with disabilities represents a significant return on investment for industry.

“Companies that actively hire individuals with disabilities position themselves to engage a diverse talent pool and reach a larger market by developing products and services for a growing segment of the population,” stated WITSA Secretary General Dr. Jim Poisant. “The ICT industry has an opportunity to take a leadership role in increasing the employment of people with disabilities in the ICT industry, setting an example that could catalyze other sectors to include persons with disabilities, encouraging large-scale economic and societal benefit across the world.”

“At SourceAmerica, we view this as an important and promising first step toward creating an Inclusion Economy – one where people of all abilities have a choice of careers and are celebrated for their unique and valuable contributions to the workforce”, said Steven Krotonsky, Chief Operating Officer for SourceAmerica. “With these policy recommendations in hand, now is the time to move forward together to bring about real change. This change isn’t just about creating new jobs; it’s about creating meaningful, long-term careers for people with disabilities, and we look forward to continuing our work with WITSA toward this important goal.”

“Having been at the intersection of technology and human rights throughout my career, I have witnessed the transformative power of innovation,” remarked H.E. Ambassador Luis Gallegos Chiriboga. “But accessible products and services are not enough. They must serve as a bridge to inclusion in the workforce. Only then can we confront longstanding economic and social inequalities experienced by persons with disabilities.”

Advancements in technology are insufficient by themselves to bridge socioeconomic marginalization experienced by persons with disabilities worldwide. In fact, technological innovations alone have the potential to widen the digital, economic and social divide between persons with and without disabilities. As discussions take place on how to increase access to ICT worldwide, WITSA therefore supports a strategic focus on actionable outcomes that narrow the gap in employment for persons with disabilities. The policy interventions outlined in the paper are intended to achieve the desired outcomes by supporting greater access to employment opportunities, technology, education, and workforce development.

The statement can be found on the WITSA web site at the following link:

https://witsa.org/papers/WITSA_Statement_on_Inclusion_PWD_in_ICT_final.pdf

About WITSA:

The World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) is the leading recognized international voice of the global ICT industry, whose members from over 80 countries and economies represent more than 90 percent of the world ICT market. WITSA is dedicated to advocating policies that advance industry growth and development; facilitating international trade and investment in ICT products and services; strengthening WITSA’s national industry associations; and providing members with a broad network of professional contacts.

WITSA members are leaders in a globally interconnected marketplace. Because the challenges facing the ICT industry are undisputedly global in nature, WITSA members work together to achieve a shared vision on important issues of common interest. WITSA makes it possible for its members — ranging from Mongolia and Argentina to Kenya and the United States — to identify common issues and priorities, exchange valuable information, and present a united position on industry issues. For more information on WITSA, please visit www.witsa.org