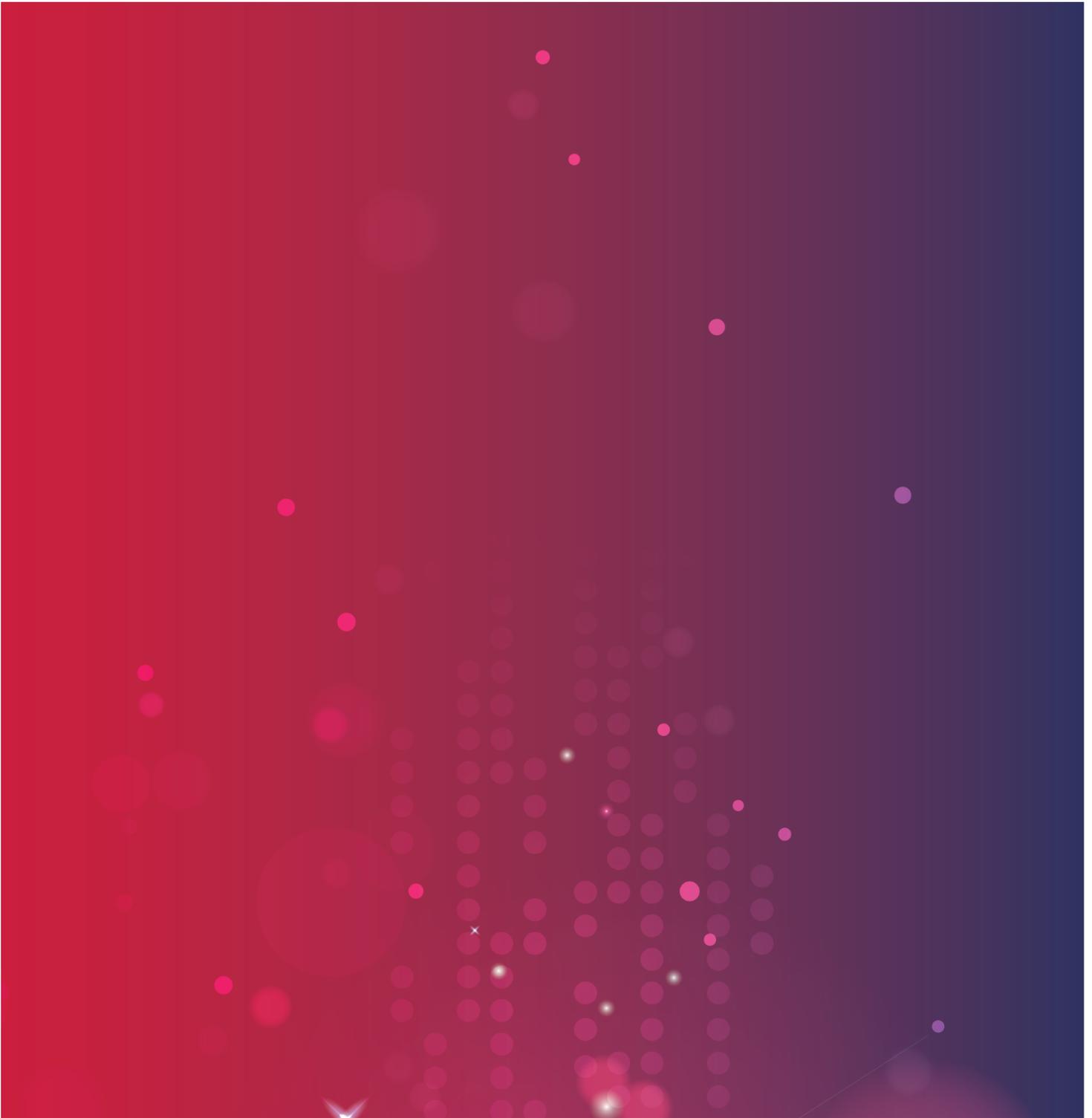# Digital Nations Ministerial Statement

Digital Nations 8ᵗʰ Ministerial Summit

We, the Digital Nations Ministers, met virtually on 18 November 2021, under the chairmanship of Chris Philp MP, Minister for Tech and the Digital Economy of the Government of the United Kingdom, to discuss the digital government agenda in line with the theme of '*Digital Government in Open Societies: Sustainable, Inclusive, and Values-driven Innovation*'.

The global pandemic has proven beyond doubt that digital technologies play a crucial role in allowing our governments to meet the needs of our citizens whether in relation to delivering healthcare, social support, information, or education. We affirm our shared commitment to using digital technology to build back better. Acknowledging the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our societies, we discussed the opportunities digital innovation offers in tackling these, and other emerging challenges, including climate change, and exclusion and inequalities.

As digital governments in open societies, we share a commitment to promoting inclusion, sustainability, and our shared values. We reaffirm our shared aim to work together to accelerate our digital transformation and become more proactive, responsive, and resilient digital governments. Working together, our governments will continue to use technology to break down barriers between government and people, and to embrace innovative digital solutions that deliver real-world impact.

Sustainable Innovation
Technological advances, such as in the use of big data and artificial intelligence, offer ground-breaking opportunities for governments and the international community to tackle our most pressing challenges, including climate change. As sustainable digital governments, we affirm a shared commitment to making better use of data, digital tools and technologies to reduce the environmental impacts of our government's own operations, and to strive to address the sustainability considerations of digital activities.

Inclusive Innovation
We remain committed to putting people at the centre of digital transformation. We will continue to deliver inclusive policies that narrow the digital divides: this includes widening access to the Internet and to digital tools and technologies, enhancing our digital infrastructure to reach underserved communities, building digital skills and digital confidence, and designing for accessibility. We recognise our responsibility to ensure no individual is left behind as we accelerate the digital transformation of our governments.

Values-driven Innovation
We believe that public trust in the digital services and tools we develop and deploy are paramount to their successful adoption. As leading digital governments in open societies, we recognise that accelerating digital transformation must therefore be guided by our shared

values. We affirm our shared commitment to putting in place the right safeguards, including for human rights, data protection, data ethics, and to promoting transparency and public confidence in public sector use of data and digital technologies.

We look forward to continuing to work together to progress shared priorities as leading digital governments, and welcome work undertaken this year through Digital Nations Thematic Working Groups in the following areas:

Artificial Intelligence Working Group

The use of algorithms, algorithmic decision-making and artificial intelligence (AI) in the public sector has the potential to transform how government interacts with the public, enabling personalised, responsive, and efficient government services. AI can also play an invaluable role in supporting and enhancing government decision-making and policy-making in diverse areas, from climate change mitigation, to healthcare. We affirm the importance of fostering responsible AI development and use in the public sector, and building capabilities and skills. We recognise the need to ensure public confidence through proper management of the potential risks, considering factors such as AI bias, algorithmic transparency, ethical and other safeguards, data management, among others.

We welcome ongoing initiatives within the Digital Nations AI Working Group to share insights and lessons learned, including the 2021 paper, "Creating the Right Culture to Foster AI and Manage Change: Lessons from the Digital Nations Countries".

Data 360 Working Group

We recognise and reaffirm the common data vision and data principles laid out in the Digital Nations Data 360 Declaration, addressing how governments create, collect, manage, govern, share and use data, with the aim of improving service delivery, better informing decision-making, enhancing operations, promoting innovative research and development, and fostering trust through transparency and accountability.

The Covid 19 pandemic has reinforced the role of data as a vital asset, underpinning effective and responsive digital government, enabling evidence-based decision-making and policy-making, and innovation. It has also underscored the potential of responsible data use, which effectively balances considerations including public trust, privacy, security and innovation. We welcome ongoing cooperation within the Digital Nations Data 360 Working Group, including efforts to learn lessons from Digital Nations member countries' use of data in the context of the pandemic. We recognise the value of sharing our experiences through the Digital Nations to support future innovation.

Digital Identity Working Group

In the digital and data-driven age, digital identity solutions and products have the potential to unlock innovation in both the public and private sector, and drive benefits for individuals, and the wider economy. They are key to transforming the delivery, efficiency and accessibility of public services, and can play an important role in enhancing security, as well as promoting inclusion. At the same time, we recognise the importance of effective governance and

putting in place the right frameworks to ensure public confidence in digital identity solutions, protect privacy and data, and promote transparency and inclusion.

As we work to fully realise the benefits of digital identity solutions in our respective contexts, we recognise the importance of collaborating through the Digital Nations, to explore opportunities for interoperability and facilitate the cross-border use of digital identities in the future.

<u>Sustainable Government IT Working Group</u>

We recognise the transformative potential of digitalisation to improve the sustainability of government operations, as well as the need to identify and manage potential sustainability risks associated with digital tools and technologies. We consider that our institutions have a unique opportunity through our cooperation in the Digital Nations to champion the reduction of the environmental footprint of hardware and software across the whole lifecycle. We therefore endorse the ***Digital Nations Shared Approach to Sustainable Digital Government***, affirming the principles contained therein, and commit to strive towards their fulfillment. We agree to work together to build and promote a shared understanding of more sustainable digital transformation.