

## Opening Remarks from the ITS Chair Stephen Schmidt (29 September 2020) for the International Telecommunications Society (ITS) Webinar on Tracking & Tracing Apps

### Introduction:

Hello and Welcome!

Thank you for being with us today. Thank you for sharing your presence, your time and your ideas.

A big thank you, in particular, to those joining us from challenging time zones:

Our friends on the West coast of North America who are in their pyjamas because it is 5 am local; and our friends throughout East Asia who may also be in their pyjamas, as well, because it is 9 pm local, or later.

We have a very interesting event for you, today, that brings together a group of 150 thoughtful individuals - both speakers and registered participants -- spanning 27 countries and every continent on earth (other than the Antarctic).

We have come together today to discuss the timely and important topic of contact tracing and tracking apps in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like the pandemic itself, our experience with contact tracing and tracking apps is new and evolving. Our insights are likewise evolving. The world is learning on the job, so to speak.

Against that backdrop, it is useful to think of today's panel discussion as a "battlefield report" sharing early insights, lessons and challenges. The definitive text book has not been written, yet. That is a task for later.

We will hear, today, from a panel of expert voices, drawn from across the globe, sharing their perspectives, their encouragement, their lessons, and their warnings – and drawing on diverse disciplinary perspectives (epidemiology, privacy law, telecommunications regulation, technology, and more) and diverse institutional settings (universities, government, industry).

I'd like to share a few observations as a framing device for our conversation:

- We know that public health outcomes during this pandemic – life and death – are highly sensitive to the quality, character and speed of the government response. Rapid, thoughtfully-conceived government responses can save lives. Slow, poorly-conceived responses cost lives.
- We are gathered here, today, precisely because of this shared sense -- of both possibility and peril -- as we look at the COVID tracking and tracing initiatives.
- We should be wary of "single, correct answers". Different countries bring different assets, attributes and practices to the fight against COVID (whether technology, law enforcement, strong public health systems, prior experience with similar flus, high social discipline and conformity, high trust in government, early action). In their own ways, Taiwan, South Korea, Germany and New Zealand are all public health successes – but achieved in different ways. There is no single "right answer".

- It is possible to have strong public health outcomes with COVID apps – or without. South Korea and Taiwan illustrate a technology-led approach to world leading public health outcomes; whereas Vietnam and Slovakia also demonstrate strong public health outcomes but without the widespread use of COVID applications.
- On app adoption: each nation will exhibit its own particular calculus around the balance between the rights of the collectivity and the individual, and around the relationship of privacy to other socially-important goals, including public health. Each nation will likewise have its own legal traditions and particular forms of government. This social context will colour and condition the adoption of COVID applications. Seeing apps in context is therefore very important.
- These apps should not be seen as “silver bullets” operating alone to provide a comprehensive contact tracing system – rather their purpose is to augment, and complement, existing systems of traditional contact tracing. We should resist the pull of technological utopianism in favour of a richer, more studied view of technology in particular social contexts.
  - And while they are not silver bullets, even at low levels of adoption, these apps can offer significant potential benefits:
    - One State of Washington study suggests that if 15% of the population used an app that notified them of exposure to an infected person, infections would be reduced by 8% and deaths by 6%.
    - Another study suggests that if 56% of a population uses a contact-tracing app and subsequently follows the testing and quarantine protocols upon receiving an exposure notification, this *alone* will be sufficient to contain CV19.

## ABOUT ITS

ITS has been convening conversations like this one, for 34 years – since 1986. We are convening dialogues (in-person and online) on the most pressing issues in global communications policy, because we know, in our hearts, that rigorous and thoughtful dialogue, undertaken in a spirit of friendship --- across countries, cultures, professional disciplines – has the capacity to change the world.

If we can come together – in a place beyond the bonds, and limits, and claims of language, history, blood and tribe – and come together first and foremost as friends, everything else becomes possible.

In dialogue together, we can create new knowledge and new insights – which, if shared and acted on, can drive new policies, new practices and new outcomes. In a genuine and fundamental sense, we have the capacity to change the world, together.

## Thank You's

I want to wrap up with some thank you's.

First off, to our speakers: you are busy and accomplished people and we are very fortunate that you are sharing your time and expertise with us, today. Thank you.

This event was conceived and crafted by my ITS Board colleague, Dr. Georg Serentchy. Georg is of the most connected people in European communications and we are very lucky to have benefited from his goodwill, vision and vast Rolodex. Thank you.

Thank you to my ITS Board Colleague, Erik Bohlin, and Chalmers University, for agreeing to act as the academic host of this event. Thank you, Erik, for your generosity and for making this event possible.

ITS accomplishes all of its work on the basis of volunteer efforts. The work that we do, around the world, is made possible by the support of our corporate members – thoughtful companies that operate in the communications sector, across the globe, and who make conversations like this possible.

My last thank you is the most important one – namely to everyone that is joining us today to share in this event.

Let's have a great conversation together.