

Connect Arab Summit, Dr. Hessa AL-JABER, Secretary General, ictQatar

The Purpose of Connecting

His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah Al Thani, His Highness Sheikh Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you in our lovely country and it is a privilege for ictQATAR to be the co-host of the Connect Arab Summit along with the International Telecommunications Union represented by its Secretary General Mr. Hamadoun Touré.

We are gathered in our lovely city of Doha to do one thing: bring together our collective ideas, resources, and resolve to effectively connect individuals, neighborhoods, cities, and nations in our region. Our target by 2015 should be that no one is denied access to any form of digital communication, and everyone is part of the connected web regionally and globally.

The Arab world is coming from behind in terms of overall development - we know that for a fact. But, we also know that we have the determination to leap-frog decades of developmental phases. In fact, we find it encouraging that some nations in the Arab world already rank in the top 30 globally in terms of overall connectedness. We also find it disheartening that other Arab nations are severely falling behind in terms of network readiness, even in relation to their economic standing.

As leaders and policy makers, this represents a separation line we must erase over a short period, and I give you 2015 as a target. Let's use our status as coming-from-behind to fuel our collective ideas, resources, and resolve to step into the lead. We may have missed the industrial revolution but the digital revolution is for us to grab.

This goal raises two questions.

The first question has to do with 'what connectedness do we want to achieve by 2015?' We want every individual in our region to have access to reliable and affordable digital communications. This would effectively position broadband as a citizen right – and it will be the simplest form of digital communications we will accept for our times.

As leaders and policy makers, it is not for us to decide on the how-to's in terms of technologies, markets, and business models. Today's word gives us numerous options,

and can therefore have absolute confidence that there are solutions for each and every challenge standing in our way – whether technical, economic, or social.

The second question has to do with ‘*what benefits do we want to derive from the achieved connectedness?*’ My belief is that connectedness is only a required passage to reach a broader level of development I define as digitization – i.e. the mass adoption of connected digital technologies and applications by consumers, enterprises, and governments. Even the most connected nations in the Arab world are still far from this goal-post, and it is one that we all must aspire to reach.

What we know today, and it is a fraction of what we will know in few years, is that digitization has a direct impact on economic strength, societal wellbeing, and effective governance. We all have to remember that success is only another form of failure if we forget what our priorities are. And our priorities through connectedness as a first step and digitization as a second step have to do with economic and societal development accompanied by good governance – full stop.

If we want to grow our economies at a pace exceeding 7% year-on-year and over sustained periods so that income and output double every decade, create 75 million jobs by 2020, and create societies that can achieve the level of progressiveness that our century demands, then we must be equipped with the digital technologies that will support our march into this prosperous future. Our youth are already telling us that their no.1 aspiration for their nations is to be technology advanced and knowledge-based.

This is the digitization I am referring to, and one that can have a marked impact in our region. Recent research is showing that a 10% improvement in digitization can trigger 0.6 percent gain in gross domestic product, and nearly 1 percent reduction in unemployment, along with a marked increase in innovation levels. And, the same 10% increase in digitization can contribute to more than 1 percent increase in the Better Life Index, and another 1 percent increase in the government Transparency Index. These are only a few examples of the opportunities before us.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that I am thrilled at the idea that we are all gathered to contribute our collective ideas, resources, and resolve to firmly engage on the connectedness path our region deserves and the digitization state we must achieve. I know in my heart and mind that we can bring a windfall of benefits to all our citizens if we can effectively marshal the powers of this gathering. I look forward to working with

all of you during this forum and for the many years to come in order to achieve our connected and digital aspiration.

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