

INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION

Telecommunication Development Bureau



Opening Remarks

BY

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INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION (ITU),

Pacific ICT Ministerial Forum: Connecting the Unconnected

Kingdom of Tonga

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Honorable Dr. Feleti Sevele, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of
Tonga,

Honorable Mr Jim Marurai, Prime Minister of Cook Islands,

Honorable Ministers,

Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here on my first ever visit to the Kingdom of Tonga and I would like to thank you, Prime Minister, for hosting this Ministerial Forum. Allow me also to thank the many Member States and partners here this week for their support and participation. In particular, I would like to thank the Pacific Islands

Forum Secretariat and UNESCAP for their special efforts in making this event a success.

Like many of you, I travelled a long way to get here and in crossing such distances, I not only saw the beauty of these islands, but was reminded of the unique challenges that you face in terms of communications.

A majority of the population in the Pacific is not benefiting from the emergence of the information society and its potential for economic and social development. Given the remoteness of the Pacific Islands and their scattered small populations this is perhaps not surprising.

As you all well know, matters have been made even more difficult due to the current global financial and economic crisis.

That's the bad news. The good news is that we are here today to find ways of facing these challenges together. I am therefore pleased to see so many Island States and partners represented here at such a high level.

To bring affordable access to the Region, we must find ways to lower the cost of ICT infrastructure development and encourage industry investment. This includes sharing infrastructure wherever possible.

As for investment, the smaller size of markets in the Pacific region and their isolated populations mean fewer players and less competition. It is therefore essential that the necessary regulatory and financial frameworks exist to encourage investment. Some progress has certainly been made in the mobile and internet markets where the introduction of competition has resulted in significant growth.

As ICT services spread, bringing advantages such as e-Health, e-Commerce and e-Government, the security of networks becomes increasingly important to build confidence in the use of ICTs. And for any Region to meet its connectivity targets, the spread of connectivity must go hand in hand with human capacity building.

Another vital role for ICTs in the region is in Emergency Communications. Natural disasters have claimed many lives in the Pacific in the last few years, so Emergency Communications are an important point on the agenda of this meeting. Building frameworks for cooperation in emergencies are an important part of maximizing the potential of ICTs to mitigate the effects of natural disasters and aid in recovery.

Honorable Prime Ministers, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have spent the last two days discussing these interesting issues and the unique challenges for the Pacific Region in terms of ICT development.

But now I look to the Prime Ministers and Ministers here today for guidance on their particular needs and on how they envisage working with ITU and other partners to improve connectivity in the Region.

This meeting could very well be seen as a sub-regional contribution to the bigger Regional Preparatory meeting that will take place in Malaysia in May, to gather the entire Asia-Pacific region's input for the World Telecommunication and Development Conference to be held in 2010. In planning the BDT's work for the years to come it is essential that we become fully aware of your needs and priorities. This Forum will also help shape the Connect Asia-Pacific Summit to be held in the not-to-distant future.

ITU is committed to working with you and the numerous partners here today to find low-cost innovative solutions to bridging the digital divide.

To achieve our global vision of Connecting the World, we must Connect the Pacific and other parts of the world that face special

connectivity challenges. For this, special targeted efforts are needed.

There are many projects underway in this regard. For example, with the support of **Andorra**, ITU is assisting several Pacific Islands with rural connectivity and ICT centres to serve the local community, including Tonga, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, and Marshall Islands.

At the same time, ITU has been assisting and will continue to help the Pacific Islands in improving their governance, policy, legal and regulatory environment with the support of **Australia**. These projects will further integrate early warning emergency telecommunications.

Building on these and other efforts, I would like to inform you about several new partnerships for the Pacific:

- On Monday of this week, I had the honour and privilege of joining the Prime Minister, Dr Feleti Sevele, Ms Helen Stig from Cisco Systems and Reverend Alifeleti Atiola for the inauguration of a new **Internet Training Centre** just a few minutes from here at the Tupou Tertiary Institute. This new centre will provide many young people with wonderful career opportunities. It is an important example of concrete actions by ITU and partners to build local human ICT capacities in the Pacific.

- It is also a pleasure for me to inform you that ITU and the **European Commission** are launching a new two year project to offer comprehensive **training programmes for policy-makers and regulators** in areas such as universal service funds, licensing, frequency management, transition to Next Generation Networks and more. This will be part of a larger 8 Million Euro ITU-EC collaboration for the Pacific, Africa and Caribbean.
- I would also like to inform you that ITU and **PITA** are launching a new partnership under the ITU Academy initiative to strengthen the **ITU Centres of Excellence** network in the Asia-Pacific Region. We will be working together to enhance human and institutional capacity and expertise in specialised telecommunications and ICT training. This partnership will produce more face-to-face and e-learning training opportunities for the Pacific Islands.
- I am also pleased to announce that ITU will be working with **Nokia Siemens Networks** to connect rural and remote communities in the Pacific and in other regions with innovative, low cost solutions. We will be identifying potential sites in the coming weeks. This partnership with NSN is part of a global flagship initiative called Connecting Villages that will involve many partners working towards the shared objective of

reaching those most isolated from the benefits of the information society. NSN is doing a live demonstration just outside of the lobby so I encourage you to drop in to have a look if you have not already done so.

- And, I am pleased to share with you a new partnership with **One Laptop Per Child** for the Pacific Region. As part of our global flagship initiative, *Connecting Children*, ITU and OLPC will be working together to provide laptops for school children in least developed countries, building on existing efforts by partners.

Honorable Prime Ministers, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While there are major challenges confronting the Pacific, there is much enthusiasm and optimism among countries and partners.

Thank you again for your personal engagement and demonstration of willingness to work together for the benefit of all Pacific countries. I look forward to a stimulating discussion and learning from your experiences over the course of the day.