

Pacific ICT Ministerial Forum: Connecting the Unconnected
Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga
19-20 February 2009

Background

The *Pacific ICT Ministerial Forum: Connecting the Unconnected*, organised by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and kindly hosted by the Kingdom of Tonga, took place 19-20 February 2009, at Nuku'alofa, Tongatapu. The Forum included official representation from 16 Pacific Island Countries, 11 Ministers responsible for Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and 2 Prime Ministers.

Ministers noted that the objective of the Forum was to provide Forum Island Countries, and other stakeholders and partners with a platform for improving access and adoption of ICT in the Pacific region, through various projects, initiatives and commitments. In particular, an objective was to advance specific initiatives in the Pacific region, including the *Digital Strategy* and the *Wellington Declaration*, to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goals of making available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies to all.

Ministers thanked the Kingdom of Tonga for their hospitality and hosting of the event. Ministers also thanked the ITU for organizing the Forum as well as the Forum Secretariat, UNESCAP, and other partners for their assistance¹.

Ministerial Communiqué

We, the representatives of the Countries of the Pacific Islands Forum:

Recalling our statement in the *Wellington Declaration* that “information and communications technologies, while not an end in themselves, have a key role to play as a basis for economic development while also promoting and enhancing

¹ Government of Australia, JAXA, PITA, SPC, The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, SOPAC, APT, Nokia-Siemens Networks, Cobham, USP, Carnegie Mellon, ESCAP/APCICT, KrCERT/CC, and O3b.

social cohesion, cultural enrichment and environmental conservation” and recognizing the efforts of the ICT Task Force in implementing the *Wellington Declaration*;

Acknowledging the need for a strategic approach to the development and use of these technologies that recognises the important role of the private sector and the value of building synergies with developments in other sectors, including health, education and energy;

Recalling the 2015 Millennium Development Goals of making available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies to all, and encouraging Forum Island Countries to adopt universal services strategies to reflect this goal;

Emphasising the importance of taking a regionally coordinated approach to ICT development;

Recognising it is important to reflect the needs of the Pacific Island Countries in the regional preparatory process for the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference to be held in 2010;

In considering five broad themes discussed at the Forum, we:

Affordable Access: Domestic and International Connectivity in the Pacific

Recognise the challenges faced by the Pacific region in improving telecommunications access due to low population densities, isolated and scattered centres of population, lack of infrastructure, and high costs of connectivity;

Recognise that cable, satellite, terrestrial wireless and mobile communications have all provided important and complementary roles in providing access to basic telecommunications and Internet-based services;

Note the range of emerging technologies offering new connectivity opportunities and reduced costs;

Welcome the assistance provided and offered by regional and international development and donor agencies;

Call for increased coordination amongst all stakeholders in the Pacific at regional, sub-regional and national levels to consolidate efforts to improve connectivity;

Direct SPC and PIFS to work with relevant regional and international agencies, including funding agencies, to rapidly progress the implementation of regional connectivity solutions that will address the communication needs of the Pacific region;

Note the positive progress of various rural connectivity initiatives² and call on international donors to continue to support these projects until they become sustainable;

Encourage Forum Island Countries to maintain backup pathways for international connectivity;

Note that enhancing domestic coverage and international connectivity will require the implementation of appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks, which could require targeted capacity building;

Note the important role of telecentres and village-wide access schemes in delivering connectivity to rural and isolated communities. Where possible, these initiatives should be implemented with an emphasis on sustainable development strategies and community business models.

Enabling Environment: Policy, Regulatory and Financial Frameworks

Acknowledge the benefits that telecommunications liberalisation has brought to the Pacific region and encourage its continuation among members;

Recognise that convergence of technologies and services has manifested itself in various forms in the Pacific region, and note that there is a need to encourage reform of existing enabling policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks in

² e.g., Pacific Rural Internet Connectivity System (PACRICS)

countries that embrace convergence and promote innovation and entrepreneurial initiatives;

Recognise that while the Pacific region is undergoing major reforms in the telecommunications/ICT sector, there is an urgent need to make available regulatory resources and build related telecommunications/ICT capacities in Forum Island Countries.

Recognise the assistance of development partners in regulatory reforms undertaken to date. While there are a number of related initiatives in the Pacific region focusing on policy and regulatory regional capacity building, efforts must be made to collaborate on these initiatives to improve synergies and ensure non-duplication of efforts;

Accordingly, we direct officials to work towards establishing a shared regulatory resource centre for the Forum Island Countries with a view to a proposal being submitted for consideration at the 2009 Forum Leaders Meeting. The forthcoming APT Pacific Island Policy and Regulation Forum, to be held 28 April-1 May 2009, will provide an opportunity for officials, working with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, to finalise a proposal.

Cybersecurity and ICT Applications

Recognise that there are a number of initiatives³ to make available low cost ICT end-user devices to Forum Island Countries and that these initiatives have brought improved access and use of ICTs, particularly for young people, and that such initiatives should be further encouraged;

Recognise that there are a number of cybersecurity-related initiatives at the regional and international levels that may offer opportunities for Forum Island Countries in related awareness raising and capacity building, the elaboration of national cybersecurity frameworks, and facilitating cooperation and coordination to address the trans-national nature of cybercrime;

³ e.g., One Laptop Per Child (OLPC)

Recognise that with improved telecommunications infrastructure and connectivity; and with the growing incidence of cyber threats, we call on Forum Island Countries to enact relevant legislation that would promote a safe and secure ICT environment. This should include national cybercrime legislation, where possible harmonised both in the region and with international norms;

Note the ITU draft scoping study on the possible establishment of a Pacific Regional Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) and request that the report be circulated to Forum Island Countries for comments;

Emergency Communications and Disaster Relief/Climate Change

Recognise the importance of ICT infrastructure and applications for early-warning and mitigation systems and in the timely management of disaster response and relief;

Note the development of regionally available disaster emergency communications facilities and encourage Forum Island Countries to incorporate these facilities into existing disaster preparedness plans;

Encourage Forum Island Countries to participate in regional and international disaster management initiatives;

Encourage Forum Island Countries to make use of emerging ICT technologies that may mitigate the impact of climate change, including early warning and response systems, and energy efficient technologies.

Human Capacity Building

Recognise that the building of human capacity in the use and application of ICTs has been previously identified by the Pacific region as a strategic priority;

Acknowledge that a widespread lack of ICT skills and the high costs of recruiting and retaining qualified professionals continues to be a significant barrier to regional development;

Welcome the increasing number of human capacity building initiatives in the region, and request that where possible relevant agencies coordinate their activities with a view to building synergies amongst these initiatives.
