ITU Cross Regional Seminar on Broadband Access

for CIS, ASP and EUR Regions

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Distinguish Chairpersons, Speakers, Delegates, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), its Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific *inter alia*, first of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Moldova for hosting the ITU Cross Regional Seminar on *Broadband Access for CIS, Asia-Pacific and European Regions* here at this beautiful city of Chisinau. In fact, Chisinau in Moldova is located at the heart or cross-road for the three regions, while Moldova itself has moved up 7 places to rank the 57th out of 152 countries for the ICT Development Index (IDI) 2010 composed of ICT access, use and skills in accordance with the ITU *Measuring Information Society 2011* Report released last month.

This Seminar is very meaningful for the Asia-Pacific in particular since it is the first ever cross-regional event in the ITU, where member countries and experts from the Asia-Pacific participate and share our experiences and challenges with other regions like CIS and Europe in order to develop or deploy broadband, which is today the very fundamental infrastructure like roads, transportations and water for the overall socio-economic development.

Needless to say before the high caliber of experts, telecommunications – now, the converged information and communication technologies (ICTs) - have been fast evolved or developed towards building the interconnected or interdependent information society, while ICTs can play a critical role in contributing to more creative, innovative and even greener world in the 21st century.

Therefore, we need ways and means to bring the benefits of the ICTs - broadband in particular – to anyone at anytime and anyplace: i.e. for the ubiquitous information society. Indeed, broadband is today considered as one of the most

powerful tools to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to drive socio-economic progress at national, regional and global levels. That is why, at the global level, ITU and UNESCO have been jointly vice-chairing the Broadband Commission together with world leaders in order to shape the connected world towards information or even knowledge society.

Dear delegates,

Please now allow me to share about the development status of ICTs – especially broadband - in the Asia-Pacific. As well articulated by the ITU's annual flagship report of *Measuring Information Society (MIS) 2011*, the Asia-Pacific region has achieved considerable growth in broadband with the world's highest number of mobile broadband subscriptions. However, let us not forget that 2/3 of the world populations are from the Asia-Pacific including China and India. In consequence, despite the large or highest number of subscriptions, broadband penetration rates in the region had reached just 7.1% for mobile broadband and 5.7% for fixed broadband respectively by the end of 2010. It also implies that the Asia-Pacific region has a huge potential for investments especially in both fixed and mobile broadband.

Meanwhile, the scope or definition of broadband itself has been evolving in terms of speed, quality and reliability from 256 Kbit/s to over 10 Mbit/s subject to the development phase of each country. For instance, in countries like the United Kingdom, there are very few subscriptions with speeds below 2 Mbit/s, while being none in the Republic of Korea, which ranked the number one of IDI 2010 in the world. In Mongolia, on the other hand, the speed below 2 Mbit/s represents more than 90 % of total fixed-broadband connections.

It means that there exists not only digital divide but also broadband divide between the regions, within the region, and even within the country itself. The broadband divide is unfolding based on not just the speed, but also differences in network capacity and quality of service (QoS). For example, while people in some countries enjoy high-speed, high-quality, and reliable broadband services, those in other countries struggle with limited bandwidth, low quality connections and interrupted services.

Dear policy-makers and regulators,

Then, how could the leading countries in the Asia-Pacific such as Singapore, Republic of Korea and Australia have succeeded in rolling out broadband networks and integrating them into their economic and social fabric ? Most of them have achieved so, not necessarily owing to vast wealth or huge investments, but mainly due to the vision of leader(s) followed by early and consistent prioritization of broadband at every level of policy-making equipped with enabling regulatory environment. Here, leadership and political will at the highest level are fundamental – if not, the very prerequisite - to promote the deployment of broadband networks or infrastructure and the development of ICT contents, uses and skills.

According to the *MIS Report 2011*, it is also interesting to learn that there is a strong link between income (e.g., GNI per capita) and IDI performance. For instance, especially such top performers as Republic of Korea and Australia are not necessarily those with the highest incomes. Then, why and how have such countries performed better or worse than their income levels ?

The most successful adopters of broadband including the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Australia and Scandinavian countries were quick to recognize broadband as a national priority, which requires for separate and steady investments. Moreover, successful countries often advocated the simultaneous development of National ICT Policies, which provided the enabling environment, awareness-raising initiatives and capacity-building programs for their citizens to acquire the skills and confidence to create, innovate, share, preserve, and ethically use information and knowledge. As a result, the enabling environment or society of those countries could pave the ways for natural supply and demands at the end by more creative and innovative industry as well as skilled people *per se*.

As the top performers have well demonstrated, it implies that strong ICT-focused policies along with various layers for raising awareness and building skills of people can make a difference. It is evident from the fact that National Broadband Plan has become the most sought after policy prerogative, while at least 70 governments have developed a national broadband plan or strategy. Several leaders in this initiative come from our Asia-Pacific region.

Dear delegates,

With regard to the priorities of the ITU Asia-Pacific region, Member States and stakeholders at the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2010 (WTDC-10) adopted five Regional Initiatives for 2011-2014 including “broadband access and uptake in urban and rural areas”. While I will present details on our Regional Initiatives and Projects especially on broadband at the Session 1, it is worth recognizing mobile or wireless revolution, through which mobile broadband subscriptions worldwide more than doubled between 2008 and 2010, while it overtook the number of fixed broadband subscriptions. By the end of 2010, over 150 countries had launched 3G mobile broadband networks, whilst wireless technologies could be one of the promising options to encourage affordable access especially for the last mile to cover rural and remote areas addressing the needs of Small Islands Developing States (SIDSs), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Low Income and/or Landlocked Developing Countries, and Countries in Special Needs, all of which are the main features of countries in the Asia-Pacific.

Having shared a glimpse of the broadband development in the Asia-Pacific, I think, this Cross Regional Seminar offers an excellent and timely opportunity for all of us to learn and share from each other on how countries are addressing the issues relating to broadband at specific-regional and cross-regional levels. We are very fortunate to have with us this mix of experts, who will provide a bouquet of various experiences and practices.

Dear all the participants,

Before closing, as I won't be here with you until the end of this Seminar, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciations in advance to the Government of Moldova for the excellent host and warm hospitality, the experts and speakers for sharing your experiences and knowledge, the delegates and participants for sparing your valuable time to attend this very important and meaningful Seminar, and my ITU colleagues from the headquarters and CIS Area Office for your efforts and dedications to make this Cross-Regional Seminar on Broadband happen.

Last but not the least, this event is sincerely hoped to provide you all with a platform for sharing and networking each other from the cross regions not simply during the Seminar but also after returning to your own country, especially when you face and deal with various policy, regulatory, technical or operational challenges to ensure the deployment of broadband and narrow the broadband divide for all so that everyone can enjoy the creative, innovative and greener information society in the digital or broadband era: i.e., digital inclusion for all regardless of regions, races, genders, ages and even persons with disabilities.

In conclusion, I wish this Cross Regional Seminar every success.

Thank you for your kind attention and participation.