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FOR ASIA AND THE PAICIFC**

WSIS Thematic Meeting on Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for
Bridging the Digital Divide
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Your Excellency Mr. Jun-Hyong RHO,
Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to convey this keynote address to the WSIS Thematic Meeting entitled Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Bridging the Digital Divide organized by the Government of the Republic of Korea and ITU.

A hallmark of the end of the last and the beginning of this century has been the marked intensification of the process of globalization. This process has manifested itself in accelerated movement of goods, services, knowledge and technology across the national boundaries. At the forefront and driving force of this has been astoundly rapid advances in information and communication technology (ICT).

The expanding range of applications of information and communication technology (IT) which promises to increase the efficiency and flexibility of production, marketing and financial, and administrative activities for both the private and the public sectors presents a new multifaceted challenge to the developing countries. These applications offer enormous opportunities to enhance the competitiveness of industry, increase the returns from trade, attract foreign direct investment and other forms of external capital, increase the integration of small and medium sized enterprises into the value chain, and enhance the service provided by the financial sector.

Unfortunately, there is also a very significant danger that countries which do not enter actively into the information age will be increasingly marginalized in the twenty-first century.

At the same time, even in the poorest countries, the rate of diffusion of ICT is increasing partly because of rapid growth of international information networking, and decrease in ICT costs and wireless applications. This may offer an opportunity for developing economies to catch up provided that the necessary capability, particularly human resource base, is present in developing countries.

However, there is currently a wide gap and divide among countries in the region and within communities in many countries. The debate on the importance of access to ICT and its value in addressing global developing disparities has become the subject of a wider discussion on the potential benefits and risks of globalization, with ICT recognized as the prominent technology that underpins the World Summit of Information Society (WSIS).

As you are well aware, WSIS is being convened in two phases, at Geneva in December 2003 and at Tunis in November 2005. The first phase of the Summit has developed and fostered a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the information society by mainstreaming ICT into the development process, while fully reflecting all the different interests at stake.

The Tunis Summit should be a Summit of solution. Preparation for the Summit has been focusing on three main areas - Plan of Action developed in Geneva, financial mechanisms for bridging the digital divide and Internet governance.

The ESCAP secretariat has played a leading and coordinating role in developing regional consensus in the context of the preparation for both stages of the Summit. The regional conferences for the Geneva phase held in Tokyo in 2003 provided valuable regional inputs and ideas for the formulation of our common understanding of the Information Society. The High-level Regional Conference for the second phase which was held in Tehran in May-June 2005 was crucial for assessing the regional implications of the decisions taken in Geneva as well as for establishing a regional mechanism for the implementation of WSIS outcomes. It adopted the

Tehran Declaration and the Regional Action Plan towards the Information Society in Asia and the Pacific.

The Conference was attended by representatives from 31 countries of Asia and the Pacific including 11 Ministers, 6 Vice-Ministers/Deputy Ministers and 6 Secretaries. The Conference was also attended by representatives of international organizations, civil societies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Altogether, over 200 participants/representatives took part in the event.

The Regional Action Plan is structured following a top-down approach for macro-planning along the regionally and globally agreed action lines as contained in the MDGs and the WSIS Geneva outcomes, and other regional and global initiatives. At the same time, in order that the plan is relevant to the realities on the ground in a diverse environment that exists in the region, a bottom-up approach of prioritization and validation has been adopted by relying on the outcome of the regional and subregional meetings and the results of survey conducted by UNESCAP. Around 600 representatives of governments of 50 countries, 35 international organizations, the private sector and NGOs took part in the drafting of the Regional Action Plan. The Plan further incorporated the result of the regional consultations and deliberations on the issues of financial mechanisms of ICT for development and Internet governance.

The Action Plan considers the ICTs as a driving force in cross-sectoral programmes for the promotion of a sustainable and dynamic information society, contribution to poverty alleviation and robust economic growth and enhanced technological innovation and development. It complements the national efforts and adds value by covering actions that a nation cannot undertake on its own due to several factors, such as the nature of the action calling for implementation on a regional /global basis, e.g., the Tsunami Early Warning System for the Indian Ocean and its integration into the global system. The Action Plan pays special attention to the promotion of the use of ICT for empowerment of women, young and senior people as well as people with disabilities.

The Tehran Declaration adopted by the Conference requested UNESCAP to coordinate the implementation of the Regional Action Plan and to accord priority to the activities proposed in the Regional Action Plan paying special attention to the needs of the least-developed, land-locked and island developing countries.

It further urges the relevant regional and international organizations especially members of the Regional Interagency Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies, as well as non-governmental organizations to cooperate with UNESCAP in planning and implementation of specific activities of the Regional Action Plan to avoid duplication of effort and ensure effective utilization of available resources.

UNESCAP's work in the field of information, communication and space technology Division has shown that the developing countries of the region require support in the development of cross-sectoral policies so as to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by these technologies. UNESCAP is focusing on providing support in this area and also promoting regional cooperation. I am pleased to inform you that UNESCAP has already initiated a number of activities for the implementation of the Regional Action Plan. For example, UNESCAP at its 61st Commission Session decided to establish an ICT training center in the Republic of Korea as a follow-up action to WSIS Geneva Phase. We are grateful that the Government of the Republic of Korea will contribute 10 million US dollars to its establishment and operation for the first five years. The new center is expected to promote ICT training in the region with the aim of narrowing the digital divide.

In conclusion, let me convey my best wishes to you all for the successful deliberations at this Meeting. I am fully confident that the Meeting which has a major focus on strengthening of multi-stakeholder partnerships for bridging the digital divide will come up with concrete results which not only benefit the discussions at WSIS but more importantly enhance our effort to bring the benefit of ICT to all.

Thank you.