

## **WSIS Thematic Meeting**

### **Welcome Speech**

**Mr. Jun-Hyong RHO, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC)**

Honorable Executive Secretary Hak-su Kim, Dr. Tim Kelly, Head of ITU Strategy and Policy Unit, Dr. Michael Reed of United Nations University of Japan, Government delegates from around the world, Representatives from international organizations, and Distinguished guests, I thank all of you for being here with us today.

It is a great pleasure to host WSIS Thematic Meeting here in Seoul under the topic of "Multi-stakeholder partnerships for Bridging the Digital Divide." The Ministry of Information and Communication, Republic of Korea and International Telecommunication Union have jointly hosted the event and the KADO has kindly organized today's meeting.

The goal of WSIS Thematic Meeting is to find ways to effectively implement the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Actions adopted at the First Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2003. I believe this gathering will contribute to making due preparations for the second phase of the WSIS in Tunisia scheduled this November.

Last June Korea agreed to jointly conduct Digital Bridges Initiative with the ITU to reduce the international digital divide and to help the successful hosting of the WSIS.

Under the initiative, Korea and ITU will develop Digital Opportunity Index to measure the level of digital divide and use their expertise in policy-making and technology to narrow the divide.

As part of such efforts, the MIC and ITU have jointly organized Digital Bridges Symposium in Busan in September 2004 along with the ITU Telecom Asia 2004. Today's WSIS Thematic Meeting offers another occasion for us to better such efforts.

Especially, Digital Opportunity Index, which will be presented today, will be reported to the WSIS in Tunisia this November and I am confident that the index, if widely adopted, will be a useful tool in measuring digital divide and developing effective policies against digital divide.

Distinguished guests,

The importance of IT cannot be overemphasized. It serves as the foundation and facilitator of a country's economic growth. At the same time, the advance in IT accelerates the emergence of a knowledge-based society. However, the gap between digital-haves and digital have-nots undermines not only the local economy but also the global economy.

Several international organizations have recognized the adverse impact of digital divide and sought ways to address it. Especially, the digital divide will be the key issue for the world leaders in the WSIS in Tunisia this November and it is the imminent challenge that requires the collective efforts of the international society.

Responding to the call of times, Korea is playing its part to narrow the digital divide. For example, Korea has invited foreign IT experts and provided opportunities for further training, dispatched its own IT experts and IT Youth Volunteers overseas and built Internet Access Centers in developing countries.

This year Korea hosted UN ESCAP ICT Training Center and the government will provide all the necessary support for the development and operation of the Center, thereby contributing to bridging the digital divide worldwide. Korea will further expand such activities and join international

efforts in closing the digital divide.

I hope that IT leaders and experts from international organizations and the private sector will hold productive discussions on ways to narrow the digital divide by sharing their experience and know-how.

Lastly, I would like to thank the speakers and panelists for their valuable contribution to the meeting despite their busy schedule.

Thank you.