

**OPENING KEYNOTE ADDRESS by THE PRINCESS ROYAL, HER ROYAL  
HIGHNESS PRINCESS SALOTE MAFILE'O PILOLEVU TUITA, of the  
KINGDOM of TONGA**

**on the occasion of the**

**i-CREATe 2010 and ITU Workshop on Accessibility to ICTs, 21 - 24 July 2010**

**23 JULY 2010, SHANGHAI, CHINA**

Dr. Eun-Ju Kim, Head, ITU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Prof. Ang Wei Tech, i-CREATe School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering,

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour to be here today in Shanghai for the International Convention for Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology 2010 (i-CREATe 2010) and the ITU Workshop on Accessibility to ICTs.

I was privileged to be present yesterday and if ever there was a truism that necessity is the mother of invention it was witnessed when we were I am sure enthralled to hear of the exciting developments to aid the impaired, especially neural modulation. It was for me breathtaking.

To be in Shanghai, the host city for World Expo 2010 and to be participating in this Conference dedicated to the promotion of technology that will alleviate the needs of people who have suffered impairment makes us all very privileged to be attendees at

this auspicious gathering. The opportunity that this Conference presents as a platform is the synergy of international, national and local government as well as private enterprise who have combined for the good of mankind.

The Declaration of Principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRDP), the tireless efforts of i-CREAtE and the continued standardization work of the ITU, have laid a solid foundation for building a truly global, inclusive and development-oriented ICT (Information) Society for all, in support of the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals.

When I hear the word “disabled” I must confess to a feeling within me of bewilderment that inevitably perplexes my response to such a nomenclature to those individuals who are unfortunately challenged, often through no fault of their own.

Traditionally, those with disabilities were seen as vulnerable people requiring special provision and protection. Recently, in my region of the South Pacific our neighbor New Zealand brought in sweeping changes in a policy which had its initial appearance in 2001 where they took on the status of the disabled as an exploited minority crying out for liberation.

I want to place on record and publically acknowledged the work undertaken by the New Zealand Ambassador Mr. Doug Bourke. He has been an instrumental figure in driving the initiative which we are now witnessing in this conference. The New Zealand Government paved the way to break down the seemingly insurmountable walls that were perceived as obstacles to the opportunity of the impaired to be able to participate in society. Pivotal in the strategies undertaken were the “NZ Disability Strategy” and the “Pathways to Inclusion” policy statements which repealed the discriminatory measures of the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act.

So too, the initiatives of the ITU as evidenced here today are both timely and eagerly awaited for all those who have impairments.

For my part, I see *disability* as not something that individuals have or suffer from. I would say that individuals have impairments and it is the concept of disability which is the end result of a strategy that results from other people creating barriers that prevent the impaired from enjoying a full life.

Your initiative, collectively, is a liberation of the impaired and not a disabling of their already challenged lives. You are in effect affording them an opportunity to be able to live in a fully inclusive society. I exhort you to persevere.

As we are all aware, the success of all these concerted efforts will require unremitting multi-stakeholder participation, cooperation and partnership, processed in a well-coordinated system. The achievement of an effort as monumental as this requires international patronage as well as the enlisting of national and regional governmental support. Equally, private enterprise cannot hope to remain aloof leaving it to be determined without their commitment.

Returning to the theme of our conference, I would hope, that appropriate measures would be put in place as a benchmark to provide us with a clear indication of where we are, and the progress being made so far, during the implementation stage. At this point, we acknowledge the special attention given to 'Connecting Persons with Disabilities' at the World Telecommunications and Information Society Day (WTISD) 2008 in Cairo and efforts made in developing a common set of vital ICT statistics for

all, and their relationship to the Millennium Development Goals, for evaluation processing to assist policy makers.

This will serve as valuable tool for follow-up beyond these meetings, as well as laying down the plan for future development.

The strategies proposed are seen as an essential tool which must be accessible to all who are impaired. The ICT has enormous power to change existing structures that impede the liberation of the impaired. The research that is being undertaken when combined with the concept of being accessible and affordable is the road map that we must embrace. In short, it enhances the ideal that those impaired will be able to be part of our society with their self esteem buoyed by their contribution to be real players in the communities in which they live. The ability to outreach all those impaired removes them as vulnerable scapegoats.

Tonga, I am proud to say, has adopted the same set of principles driven by an understanding that expanded connectivity to all those with special needs will improve their quality of life by providing them the scope for greater participation in the national and global information society that is both affordable and easy to access.

The establishment in Tonga of the 'Ofa Tui 'Amanaki Centre in 1979 by His Late Majesty, King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, has provided schooling opportunities, social and sporting events for children with impairments. The Centre is currently hosting 246 children from different conditions including visual and hearing, mental retardation, and other physical impairments.

In 1980, Her Majesty Queen Halaevalu Mata'aho established the 'Alonga Centre' for the impaired regardless of age, but who are capable of making and selling handicrafts and also organizing simple household tasks such as cooking and house cleaning. Currently there are 40 people at the Centre and some of them are undertaking vocational education, basic computer operations and others are engaged, in "touch of a button", technological activities.

But they still need more of our support and continued assistance. Indeed, ICT has offered a historic and an unprecedented opportunity not only to bridge the digital divide between us and our very own people in special needs, but also to place its potential at the service of humanity to make our world a better place. To that end and its attainment we applaud you and ask you not to be deterred from attaining for the impaired their right to live and work in society.

We must not succumb to the temptation of becoming a society which is captured by a rights based ideology that politicizes the care of the impaired. The ITU is aptly placed to ensure that this will not occur as is evidenced by the progress made thus far.

Before closing, please allow me on behalf of the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga and my delegation to convey our heartfelt gratitude to i-CREATe 2010, the ITU, and both Secretariats, as well as all who have helped with the logistical planning and convening of this conference. Finally I extend to the Government and the people of this great nation the People's Republic of China and the city Shanghai for being an excellent hosts and for your generous hospitality that has been spontaneously and generously accorded to my delegation since our arrival.

Thank you All.