OPENING ADDRESS
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR OĞUZ DEMİRALP
AT THE PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT FOR LDC IV ON DIGITAL
INCLUSION FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES:
INNOVATION, GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY
(8 MARCH 2011, ITU)

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great honor and pleasure to address such a distinguished audience today.

Our meeting coincides with the 100th anniversary of the International Women's Day. Taking this happy opportunity, allow me to commend the contributions of women to the IT sector, a field which has been perceived as male dominated until recently. Companies and governments that are able to develop and harness the female pool of talent will be more successful in a global economy in the years to come. In the IT sector, reaching out to more women will be crucial to bring about the human capital needed to stay competitive.

I would like to thank the ITU for organizing this very timely event. I believe that our discussions will serve as a valuable input to the work of the Fourth United Nations Conference for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which will be held in Istanbul in May this year.

It is the collective responsibility of the international community to lend a strong helping hand to the LDCs. It is in this spirit of partnership that Turkey has been taking an active role to foster the development of the LDCs, especially in the last decade.

In this respect, it will be a privilege for my country to host the 4th UN Conference for the LDCs. The Istanbul Program of Action that will be adopted at the Conference will further strengthen the existing spirit of international cooperation and will hopefully produce tangible results for the LDCs in the coming decade.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the challenges ahead of us today is to respond adequately to the growing needs of the LDCs to get better access to information and telecommunication

technology (ICT). Often, these new technologies become a driving force for the rest of the sectors.

It is our collective responsibility to work towards universal access to ICTs. The importance of the issue has also been enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Although all MDGs are seen as equally important, interconnected and mutually reinforcing, issues pertaining to the LDCs require special attention and action. MDG-8 explicitly calls upon the international community to address the specific needs of the LDCs. It urges us to make available benefits of new technologies, especially ICTs, in order to develop a global partnership for development. We still have four years to the deadline for achievement of the MDGs.

It is true that over the past decade, enormous progress has been made to improve LDCs access to information and communication technologies. Number of telephone lines and internet penetration increased dramatically. New generation networks and ITU flagship initiatives such as the "Build on Broadband" will have groundbreaking implications in the years to come.

Nevertheless, our task of bridging the digital divide is far from being over. While developed countries enjoy the latest technology, using broadband, next generation network, digital broadcasting and 3G IC Technologies, many LDCs are still facing difficulties to get access to even the most basic communication tools. As we are talking about "the internet revolution", we tend overlook the fact that only 1 out of 6 people in the developing world has access to the internet. This digital gap has overarching ramifications. It amplifies existing social and economic disparities. Therefore, it is our fundamental duty to address this challenge.

To close the digital divide, the contribution of developed countries becomes essential. Technology transfer to the LDCs, as well as investments in their communication infrastructure and services should be encouraged. "Best practices" should be identified and disseminated to all countries through pilot projects.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turkey attaches great importance to building a global information society. Indeed, over the last decade, we have gone through our own "digital revolution". All Turkish citizens, from the most dynamic and vibrant urban towns to the most remote corners of the country, are experiencing the impacts and benefits of this radical transformation.

I believe that Turkey's success story can set a good example, a "best practice".

Turkey has come relatively late in building a knowledge economy through the use of ICT. However, the pace of growth has so far been impressive.

In order to give an idea about the impact of this rapid change, let me share with you some figures:

- As of 2010, the Turkish ICT market size is around 7.4 billion USD.

- With mobile phone penetration close to 100%, Turkey is among the Top 15 countries in the world.

- In terms of internet penetration, Turkey is catching up with the Top 10 countries. Only ten years ago, the percentage of the Turkish population with internet access was less than 3%. Now it has reached almost 45%. Computer usage by private enterprises is almost 90%.

- The Turkish broadband market has already reached 7.5 million subscribers, with the fastest growth rate in Europe.

- As far as online marketing (or "e-Commerce") is concerned, Turkey is one of the fastest growing and most dynamic markets in the world. In the Turkish e-commerce realm, 9 million active users have spent around 5.8 billion US dollars in 2008.

- According to recent statistics, Turkish internet users have the highest level of engagement of any country in Europe, both in hours spent online and number of pages viewed.

- On the major social interaction web-site, "Facebook", Turkey has the third largest registered users, coming after the US and the UK.

How was all this possible in such a short time span?

First, we have made substantial investments to upgrade our ICT infrastructure.

Over the last decade, total length of fiber optic access and transmission cables across Turkey increased significantly. Only in the last year, over 7000 km of fiber optic access cables were installed to increase broadband capacity and quality. Broadband infrastructure is now accessible to 90% of our population.

Second, we set up a sound and comprehensive legislative framework.

All ICT related activities in Turkey are governed under the umbrella project "e-Transformation Turkey". Launched in 2003 the project aims at transforming Turkey into an information society in an integrated manner, with the participation of all stakeholders.

As far as ICT legislation is concerned, here are some highlights:

- Exclusive rights of "Turk Telekom", the government owned fixed-line operator in the telecommunications sector, were abolished in 2004. The sector is now fully liberalized and new operators entered into the market. 55% share of Turk Telekom was privatized in 2005.

- "Electronic Signature Law" was adopted in 2004. Since then, usage of electronic signatures has increased rapidly. As of 2010, total number of qualified electronic signatures in Turkey is over 250.000.

- "Universal Service Law" put into force in 2005, sets out the principles and rules on providing universal service in a liberalized market. Many ICT related activities are currently financed through the "Universal Service Fund".

- As a part of public administration reform, "e-government" is becoming more and more widespread. A recent component, "e-government Gateway", now provides a single point of access for all e-government services. We are also carrying out a large-scale project to replace paper ID cards with electronic ones. The deadline is set for 2017.

- In 2010, amendments were made to the Turkish Constitution, regarding provisions on the privacy of personal data. A draft law on personal data protection is currently before the Parliament.

Third factor in Turkey's success was the establishment of a strong regulatory mechanism.

The pain pillar of this mechanism is "the Electronic Communications Law", which was adopted in November 2008. It sets the framework, notably as regards the authorization rules and the tasks of the regulator. The independent regulatory institution, "Information and Communication Technology Agency" (ICTA), continues to modernize regulations, in particular as regards authorization, spectrum management, access and interconnection, numbering, number

portability, rights of way, and tariffs. ICTA also introduced a strategic plan for 2010-2012, which provides a three-year perspective for the sector.

As a fourth component, I would like to mention our emphasis on innovation and R&D.

Since 2008, through "Technology Development Zones" Turkey gives specific incentives to companies involved in new and innovative R&D and software development activities. As of the end 2010, among the 1500 companies operating in these Zones, 60% are engaged in ICT-related activities.

We are now working on the establishment of "Information Valleys". The aim is to attract international ICT companies and to encourage them to collaborate with their Turkish counterparts.

Last but not least, Turkey's success is largely due to our continued focus on the social inclusion aspects of transformation.

To this end, we have been launching innovative projects, tailor-made for specific target groups.

One striking example is the pilot project called "internet in every classroom", which was launched at the end of last year. The aim is to have laptop computers with an internet connection in every primary and secondary school classroom and to replace traditional blackboards with interactive "smart boards". Furthermore, school curricula will be presented in an electronic format, in "e-books", so that pupils and teachers can get access to them wherever they are. Currently launched in 570 thousand primary and secondary schools (including in villages), the project will be disseminated to the whole country within the next three years.

There are similar projects designed to increase computer literacy among women, the disabled population and those living in rural areas. For instance recently, 2000 public internet access centers were established in rehabilitation units for children and the elderly people. These also serve as IT training centers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you will recall, Turkey hosted the World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC-2000) in Istanbul in 2000. Only two years later, the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-02) was held again in Istanbul. Finally in 2006, Turkey had the honor and the privilege to host the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in Antalya. These contributions have been

acknowledged by the international community, with Turkey's re-election to the ITU Council for the third time, at the elections held in Guadalajara, Mexico in October 2010.

Digital inclusion in Turkey so far has been a success story. Yet, we are aware that our work is far from being over. In an age when technology advances at such a rapid pace, no country has the luxury to fall into apathy. Constant progress and innovation, sustainable and continuing investments in the ICT sector, a sound and strong regulatory mechanism are essential tools to build up on our already achieved progress.

It is indeed not an easy task to achieve widespread and equitable access to the use of ICT. Nevertheless it is an essential one. We cannot claim to live in a "global village", while a significant part of the world cannot enjoy the benefits of globalization to a full extent. Nor can we talk about a "digital revolution", if the latest technological advances are closed to the majority of the world's people.

In this regard, Turkey is well aware of its responsibility and is committed to sharing its experience and best practice with the LDCs.

I am confident that the spirit of cooperation will prevail at the Istanbul Conference and produce positive results for shaping the future of the information society.

We look forward to seeing you all in Istanbul in May.

Thank you.