



## **Asia-Pacific Digital Societies Policy Forum 2017**

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*WELCOME SPEECH*

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Excellency, Mr. Pichet Durongkaveroj, Minister of Digital Economy and Society, Kingdom of Thailand

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Mr. Alasdair Grant, Head of Asia, GSMA

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of ITU, I would like to express our sincerest gratitude to the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, Kingdom of Thailand for its kind hosting of this Asia-Pacific Digital Societies Policy Forum 2017. The Minister himself in particular is very much supportive to the forum and although he cannot make it to the opening session, he is kindly committed to be here and share some words with us today, just before lunch break, and hence we look forward to welcoming him soon. This Forum is an excellent example of collaboration of ITU with GSMA with support from the Royal Thai Government which has initiated reforms to promote the digital economy in order to modernize the country for the benefit of all aspects of the Thai economy. In fact, the Thai government has restructured former Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) to Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES), showing its clear focus on digital societies. I am very delighted to witness a third successive forum after two previous successful ITU- GSMA 'Digital Societies Policy Forums' held in Bangkok, Thailand.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This forum is taking place at a time when we are starting to write a new page in the history of the ICTs, thanks to the applications associated with them. Big Data, open data, Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence, are all increasingly becoming essential tools for decision-making and management. With rapid development of Artificial Intelligence, it is estimated that by end of 2017, 24 million Americans will have robots at home interacting with human beings. The Digital transformation is driven by facts and trends.

Although it is estimated that 47% of the world's population is now online, it still leaves 3.9 billion people offline. Great disparities continue to exist especially in the least developed countries where only one out of seven people are connected. ITU takes this very seriously, as connecting the unconnected is at the core of its mission, and closing the digital divide has long been one of its major goals. The development and adoption of broadband, and particularly mobile broadband, by which most people now connect to the Internet, continues to play a key role in our efforts.

Cross sectoral collaboration between different sectoral ministries / industry is one of the key success factors for realising digital societies and to cite one example of collaboration between ICT and financial sector is another important area of work in ITU to enable people to participate in the digital economy, by carrying out financial transactions online. It is estimated that there are 2 billion people in the world without a bank account, and of these, 1.6 billion are mobile phone subscribers. To address this issue ITU has formed a unique collaboration with regulators from both financial and telecommunications sectors, digital financial service operators, mobile network operators, payment service providers, and consumer protection organizations with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Bank and the Bank for International Settlements.

Let me briefly touch on the theme of the Forum ,as we move forth on striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), cities have been encouraged to use ICTs to address urban challenges and provide a better quality of life to its inhabitants. Consequently, the Smart Sustainable Cities (SSC) paradigm has gained momentum. Using ICTs offers urban stakeholders: (i) the benefit of efficiency in urban operations and services, (ii) means to improve quality of life (QoL) and (iii) the cultivation of environmental sustainability.

As the establishment of SSC is a long term process and cannot be achieved overnight, it is essential that a set of indicators are defined that

would not only allow for comparability but would also promote sustainable development along with each city being able to quantify improvements as time passes. ITU and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) launched "United for Smart Sustainable Cities" (U4SSC) in response to the Sustainable Development Goal 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". U4SSC will primarily advocate for public policy to encourage the use of ICTs to facilitate and ease the transition to smart sustainable cities. In this regard, the KPIs for SSC developed by the ITU and UNECE provide a set of credible, relevant, objective and comparable indices to measure the progress achieved in transitioning to a smart city. Dubai was the world's first city to join ITU's KPI pilot project in 2015. Singapore quickly followed suit, later followed by other cities, including Manizales (Colombia), Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Valencia, Santiago de Chile, Rimini (Italy) and Wuxi (China).

This forum is an excellent example of ITU industry collaboration supported by the Royal Thai Government. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to our host MDES Thailand, GSMA, sponsors and most importantly all the speakers, contributors and participants for your active contribution and the participation.

I wish you all a very interactive, productive and successful forum.