

**Address by Mr. Anshu Prakash, Chairman, Digital Communications Commission and Secretary, Telecommunications, Government of India at 17<sup>th</sup> World Telecom Indicators Symposium (WTIS), Geneva on 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 2020.**

- Excellency Mr. Houlin Zhao, Secretary General, ITU
  - Excellency Ms. Doreen Bogdan Martin, Director, BDT, ITU
- Excellencies, Distinguished Members, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My greetings and Namaste to all of you.

I deem it a great privilege and honour, to chair and address the Opening Session, of the World Telecom Indicators Symposium.

2. Excellencies, the theme of the symposium is “towards an inclusive Digital Society”. Each word in this phrase is significant. Our goal is Digital Society.

But what kind of digital society are we seeking? An inclusive society. The benefits of digital society should be universal. All countries, All states, All persons.

And the word “towards”, signifies that work is in progress: That we have to make efforts to reach our goal.

3. Excellencies, the global pandemic faced today, further highlights, the role of inclusive digital society. In situations of lockdowns, curfews, restrictions on national and international travel, quarantine, hospitalization, etc., it is the digital

communication networks, which are connecting all countries, organizations and families. In fact, it would be impossible, to fight the Pandemic and the virus, without the strength and artillery, which digital communications places at our disposal. Even for vaccine distribution and administration, digital communications and networks, will play a key role. In the coming years, with Industry 4.0, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Machine to Machine communication, Robotics, etc., the concept of digital society will gain even more prominence.

4. Inclusive digital society must bridge various gaps and divides. These include, the divide between the rich and the poor, haves and have-nots, rural and urban areas, inter-country and intra-country disparities, among others. Deficiencies of access to technology; equipment and smart devices; content and carriage networks also exist. We also face issues of, lack of digital literacy and skills, problems faced by geriatric population, requirements of persons with special needs, and reaching out to marginalized groups and communities. I trust you will all agree, that above challenges, inter-alia, must be addressed by this World Telecom Body to achieve the goal, of an inclusive digital society.

5. I submit that all organs of ITU, and all pillars of this esteemed global organization, will need to contribute in this endeavor. Hence, the T or Technical Sector, will come up with technologies which are affordable, accessible and can be adopted by all Member States. Similarly, the standards approved by ITU, must be

such that they are conducive to meet the challenges already listed by me. In the same manner, the Radio Sector, must also leverage the strengths of spectrum, a valuable natural resource at our disposal, to facilitate that benefits of digital society, reach those who need them most.

6. Furthermore, we must recognize, that Governments alone, may not be able to achieve our objective, in the desired time frame. Hence, active collaboration and partnership is required, with business, academia, scientists, innovators and the civil society.

7. Excellencies, ICT indicators are an important tool, available to us, to measure and monitor progress, identify actionable items and guide policies to be formulated and adopted for transiting to a digital society. We must, however, ensure that these indicators are realistic, focus on outcomes, are flexible, and recognize the existing base from which each country is attempting to achieve progress. The Start line of each country is different. Hence, inter se efforts and resources required, will also differ. This should be duly factored in.

8. Excellencies, we have a packed agenda, which is both comprehensive and meaningful. We look forward to considerable value addition from all distinguished speakers and participants.

9. While physical person to person meeting would have been wonderful, in the given current circumstances, I again congratulate and thank ITU D Sector and all concerned Units and Departments responsible for organizing this virtual symposium. Their efforts have enabled us to come together, to be connected, and to work towards our objective, of an inclusive digital society.