OPENING STATEMENT
4th Session Committee on Information and Communications Technology
Bangkok, 14 October 2014

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Afternoon.

I would like to welcome you all to the 4th Session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission of the Asia Pacific, or UN ESCAP. First, I would like to congratulate the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division of the UN ESCAP for organizing this Session, and thank the Government of Thailand for hosting this event.

I am glad to report that we have accomplished significant outcomes related to the development agenda of ESCAP from the Expert Consultation of the Asian Information Superhighway and Regional Connectivity held in Manila, Philippines, Baku, Azerbaijan and Paro, Bhutan - specifically, on the enhancement of the interactive Asian Information Superhighway Terrestrial and Submarine Cable Systems Map. This will help provide an important means of identifying missing cross-border links, choke points and black spots. Identifying these elements will open opportunities to leverage the existing pathways of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway.

The creation of a Technical Working Group on seamless regional connectivity will bring together government infrastructure and regulatory experts to achieve the primary objective of creating an intergovernmental framework agreement on principles and norms for the development of a Pan-Asian terrestrial fiber-optic network. This is an excellent opportunity to provide synergies with UN system partners, specifically the ITU, for the undertaking of similar initiatives on regional connectivity with the end view of eventually unifying and harmonizing the effort not only for Pan-Asia but for the entire world.

We also welcome and share the enthusiasm of regional partners and financing institutions in joining the collaborative projects of ESCAP on regional connectivity, resiliency and redundancy of critical ICT infrastructures, and other development initiatives that will impact cross-sector synergies of these vital facilities.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to ESCAP for giving special attention to the significance of ICT as a critical infrastructure for enhanced e-resilience and disaster risk management. Because of this, it is expected that the response mechanisms of the region for Disaster Risk Mitigation and Management (DRMM) initiatives will greatly improve and evolve more quickly on a track of success.

October 2013 was the month the Philippines was staging to deploy its first large scale pilot of TV White Space technologies with the objective of determining the efficacy of these technologies to connect the vast unserved rural areas. This objective however was surreptitiously set aside by a massive earthquake on the island of Bohol – the project's pilot area. Very quickly and immediately, these technologies demonstrated themselves as effective tools for mitigating the effects of the earthquake that cut communications and power lines. But the demonstration did not stop there, two (2) weeks later on November 8, Super Typhoon Haiyan devastated our country. Once again the TV White Space technologies pilot for rural broadband connectivity was called upon to play a key role in the relief efforts and again these technologies demonstrated their abilities.

The central idea of our TV White Space technologies program is borne out of the need to provide connectivity to those areas beyond the economically feasible reach of traditional broadband infrastructure, to deliver public services, especially to our schools, health centers, emergency responders and local government units. The unserved areas in the Philippines are vast, reflected by a report from our Department of Education in 2012 that 83% of its 38,569 public elementary schools are in an area without Internet connectivity.

Using the abundant unassigned TV channels for wireless data connectivity, the Dynamic Spectrum Assignment regime promises exponential macro-economic viabilities vis-à-vis the traditional spectrum management regime, while preserving the original, globally agreed, public service mission of the television broadcast service.

These TV White Space technologies are not necessarily detrimental to the financial viability of existing connectivity services, such as copper, optical fiber or even the traditional wireless technologies of 3G, LTE and LTE Advanced we see on the horizon. TV White Space technologies in fact can provide the missing inroad to the necessary economic environment under which the traditional, higher performing, technologies would be viable.

For a country like ours, the deployment challenges for TV White Space technologies could be summed up into three (3) issues:

1) the lack of interdependent infrastructures, such as road networks and power lines;

2) the need for an enabling environment for private investment; and,

3) the need to strengthen planning, coordination and communication mechanisms to harmonize and rationalize the implementation of deployment and development programs.

In recognizing the opportunities and challenges of ICT initiatives, we are counting on the support and continuing interest of the ESCAP, more specifically the Committee on ICT to build on the active and cohesive interactions between and among UN development agencies and their regional counterparts to bring the use of these catalytic TVWS technologies to their fullest potential for economic and social development.

And, as we move forward to the agenda of the 4th session, I am confident that this meeting will be instrumental in developing dynamic and appropriate recommendations that can immediately be translated to positive and united action for more enhanced regional cooperation.

In the sessions ahead the key objective is an information superhighway for the region:

- an e-Highway for the realization of sustainable development across and amongst countries in Asia and the Pacific;