

## **OPENING SPEECH**

**UNDERSECRETARY LOUIS NAPOLEON CORPUZ CASAMBRE**  
**Department of Science and Technology**  
**Information and Communications Technology Office**  
**Philippines**

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**COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY**  
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*Ladies and Gentlemen, Greetings from the Philippines!*

In behalf of my country the Philippines, I would like to congratulate the Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the organizers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for gathering all of us today in this very important meeting. It is indeed a privilege for me to join all of you today to discuss pressing issues surrounding us in this part of the Region. The theme of today's meeting :“Connecting Economies and Knowledge-Networked Societies for Sustainable Development” is very fitting with the times and echos a similar theme of a “Connected ASEAN: Enabling Aspirations” of the recently concluded ASEAN ICT Ministers Meeting of which the Philippines is also currently the chair.

We are gathered here to analyze key emerging policy challenges, discuss options and promote the coordination of ICT policies at the regional level for sustainable development. ESCAP established the Committee on ICT (CICT) in its Resolution No. 64/1 dated 30 April 2008 to hold this session and discuss issues towards the following:

1. The integration of information and communications technology (ICT)-related issues in development policies;
2. The promotion of ICT transfer and use at the regional and subregional levels;
3. The development of human and institutional capacities in the use of ICT.

Aligned with these agenda items, allow me to share some insights from our end:

We strongly support the urgent need for all ESCAP members and other economies to collaborate in bridging the digital divide among others. In recognition of this, it is imperative that we focus our discussion on key emerging ICT policy challenges and ways to promote deeper regional connectivity with a view to bridging the digital divide. We must also discuss the very important role of ICT in promoting knowledge sharing and capacity-building for sustainable and inclusive development. This meeting will also provide us an opportunity to review and discuss emerging issues related to the measurement of ICT core indicators in the region, including the need for the development of gender differentiated statistics.

At the recently concluded ASEAN Telecommunications IT Ministers and Senior officials meeting last week in Mactan, Cebu, the ASEAN TELMIN and TELSOM reiterated their commitment to ICT infrastructure development and broadband in helping bridge the persistent digital divide in the Region, through the signing of the Cebu-Mactan Declaration.

ASEAN Member States agreed to implement a six pronged approach in achieving the aims of the ASEAN ICT Masterplan 2015, these areas of focus include: Economic Transformation, People Engagement and Empowerment, Innovation, Infrastructure Development, Human Capital Development and most of all bridging the Digital divide.

In Bridging the Digital Divide the ASEAN TELSOM AND TELMIN are looking at the following measures to address this pressing issue:

- Encourage the establishment of strong and clear policies and programmes to accelerate the achievement of universal access to broadband within and among the AMS;
- Improve access of broadband (fixed/mobile) Internet in rural and remote areas and develop clear policies on how to provide affordable ICT access and services;
- Continue to promote Broadband connectivity to rural areas through new emerging technologies.

- Urge the adoption of ICT in primary school curricula to encourage creativity, and support continuous collaboration between the ICT and Education sectors to promote the use of ICT creatively, effectively, and positively within and beyond the school environment;
- Further encourage AMS to initiate programs and strategies to ensure every child and those with special needs in the region, including in rural, underserved and unserved areas, have access to broadband Internet; and
- Maintain the support for continuous development and advances in ICT through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders in acquiring full benefits of technology for economic and social development so as to enable ASEAN aspirations through ICT.

The Philippines shares in the principle that broadband connectivity is a basic infrastructure and a critical foundation for socio-economic development.

Inasmuch as developments in ICT have fuelled economic progress in our respective countries the need to address the digital divide is as prevalent now as it was twelve years ago, particularly in rural areas with limited ICT infrastructure. With the speed of developments in ICT and its strong economic impact, inclusive growth should always be top of mind so we may ensure that the digital divide gets smaller as we move through the information age.

It was with this in mind the Philippines launched the TV white space initiative to address the need to provide rural broadband connectivity in areas that were deemed commercially unviable by the private sector, the unassigned UHF frequency spectrum that TV white space technology uses covers greater distances than conventional wireless broadband, it also has the capability of passing through walls and thick vegetation as well as propagate over bodies water, making it ideal for the Philippine setting.

I am sure all of you are familiar with the World Bank study on how increased broadband penetration translates to a significant increase in GDP. It is with this in mind that we need to focus our efforts in providing access to information and the improving the capacity to handle information for our citizens, particularly those who have limited access to it now.

With guidance from members and associate members and with generous funding support provided by its development partners, the transformative impact of ICTs can spread across the region. The **Internet can become a right shared by all for sustainable development.**

At this conference let us all strive to make a big difference, with not only our nation's interests in mind but the whole region as well.

***Thank you very much and a pleasant day to all you.***

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