



## Envisioning Asia-Pacific 2020

Tim Unwin (Secretary General, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation)

Sawasdi Krub!

Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra; Dr. Hamadoun Touré, Secretary General of the ITU; Your Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues.

Speaking last means that much of what I had wanted to say has already been said. But let me reinforce some of the messages of my distinguished colleagues.

Envisioning is about not only having a vision for the future, but also the capacity and enterprise to be able to deliver it. The last decade has been one of hope and aspiration. It has shown what is possible; it has also shown what we have not yet been able to deliver. Unless we act with urgency, I fear that the trend of increasing inequality that has been exacerbated by all too many ICT initiatives will become such that our most marginalised brothers and sisters will be left even further behind in terms of the benefits that such technologies can offer.

My vision for 2020 is quite simply that the best of what the countries and peoples of Asia and the Pacific have already achieved in the field of ICTs and Telecommunications should be available to all, everywhere. To do this, we need to overcome four main challenges, each of which also present exciting opportunities for innovation and creativity:

1. *The challenge and opportunities of connectivity:* in particular, I am conscious of the great difficulties in achieving affordable broadband connectivity in many of the small island states of the Pacific and isolated rural areas of mainland Asia. The CTO is committed to working together with the ITU and the Commonwealth Secretariat to ensure that all Commonwealth countries have national broadband strategies in place,

and that these are implemented to the advantage of the most marginalised. This challenge opens up many opportunities for innovative technological solutions to deliver value for money connectivity for all. I have come here direct from the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Sri Lanka, and I am delighted that Heads of all Commonwealth states specifically endorsed this broadband initiative in the Communiqué that was issued yesterday.

2. *The challenge and opportunities of regulation:* too often, the mantra of liberalisation and competition being the only mechanism for lowering costs of access to digital communication technologies has dominated global discourse. For the smallest, most scattered island states of the Pacific, as indeed in other parts of the world, the reality is that the population is simply too small for 'the market' to drive price reductions effectively. Novel regulatory mechanisms need to be in place to enable the market to function as efficiently as possible where it can, but also to ensure that those beyond the reach of the market can benefit. There are many opportunities for innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships to deliver effective solutions that will enable the poorest to access the benefits of ICTs.
3. *Supporting the most marginalised:* people with more disabilities have far more to gain from digital technologies than those of us who have fewer disabilities. This is not only a moral agenda, but also one that brings real economic opportunities and benefits; enabling the 10% of our population who have some kind of disability to contribute productively to our economies through the use ICTs is of critical importance to all of our futures. We must build on the best of how ICTs have been used effectively by people with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, not only here but also throughout the world.
4. *The challenge of nature:* we cannot but be struck by the recent typhoon devastation in the Philippines; there are enormous opportunities for more effective use of ICTs in environmental monitoring and disaster management. We need to harness the potential of technology to enhance the efficacy of our response efforts to support those who lives have been destroyed by the power of nature. I have been dismayed at the length of time it has taken the global community to respond to this devastation. Together, we must do more.

My vision, distinguished colleagues, is simple. It is one where the best of human innovation in Asia and the Pacific is used in the interests of the poorest and most marginalised. To deliver this, we need to place much more emphasis on delivering effective solutions in the interests of all; we have done the easy bit, we have connected the most connectable; now we need to build on Asian and Pacific creativity to ensure that there is indeed accessibility for all. We must do this together in partnership, in unity, and in the strong belief that we can indeed deliver this vision.