

**As delivered**

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Honourable Heads of State,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Dr. Touré,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

### **ICT for E-quality**

I would like to focus my attention today on ICT for E-quality – the promotion and application of ICT to close development gaps, address inequalities, and build a more inclusive and sustainable future for all the people of Asia and the Pacific.

Our shared digital future is both promising and problematic. Promising, because effective use of ICT innovation can offer unprecedented opportunities to create, adapt, store and share information that promotes E-quality – building knowledge economies, and more effectively addressing social and economic disparities.

This ICT-enabled future is, at the same time, problematic because the benefits of new technologies are not equally benefiting all people. The Asia-Pacific region is

now not only the most technologically divided in the world, this divide has also continued to widen over time.

This need not be the case, however, as ICT is both a new engine of economic growth and a valuable source of innovation. These technologies have spurred a virtuous circle of skills, employment and investments in applications and tools that are fundamental leaps in innovation. These are not just better ways of doing old things, but radically new ways of doing previously impossible things.

Far-flung villages are now connected with booming megacities. Old economic boundaries have given way to a new paradigm of economic opportunity that allows previously isolated communities and marginalized people to take a place on the global stage.

Mobile phones, as well as broadband-enabled smart devices and high-speed communication networks, are breaking down the barriers of geography. In fact, I am very pleased to learn that the ITU has sent mobile phones and emergency satellite equipment to the Philippines to assist in the recovery efforts from the typhoon that devastated that country.

Madame Ambassador, I would like also to convey my condolences to the country.

### **Transformative impact of ICT**

There is a new generation that have grown up with mobile phones and the Internet as basic tools of modern life. Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Line, have enabled instant one-to-many communication.

Distance learning and ICT-enabled classrooms are increasing educational opportunities, bringing electronic textbooks and teachers to remote cities and villages. In healthcare services, broadband-enabled hospitals provide online access to personal health information that collates patient data for safer and more effective patient assessments.

In a world where wearable computers, near-field devices, and fibre-optic home networks are already becoming commonplace, ICT is indeed an innovative force for transformation.

### **Bridging Divides in Asia and the Pacific**

Yet, I want to stress that the “digital divide” is in fact an income divide, a gender divide, an educational divide and a knowledge divide. Rising inequality – both income and non-income – poses one of the greatest challenges in Asia and the Pacific, and these are the gaps that need to be addressed.

Even among those who are connected to these knowledge networks, especially the youth, we see enormous disparities across Asia and the Pacific. For example, in the Republic of Korea, 99.6 per cent of young people have been active on the Internet for at least five years, while in Timor-Leste this figure is less than 1 per cent. This stark divide – young people in the region living in two vastly different worlds – has enormous implications for our youth, and the region.

I would also like to stress that we are facing a cross-cutting gender divide. Women and girls in Asia and the Pacific, regardless of geographic location, level of income and age, have less access to knowledge-enhancing software applications and ICT. These are challenges that the region must confront.

### **Post-2015 Development Agenda**

It is clear that much work remains to be done before we can say that ICT has led to shared improvements in living standards for all across our region. The Secretary-General has called on all countries to optimize the power of ICT to support sustainable development.

As the global community shapes the post-2015 development agenda and negotiates the new set of universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is imperative that we harness the power of ICT as a critical component of innovation and sustainable development solutions.

It is indeed fitting that this Summit is being held in Bangkok, where Thailand is fast becoming a regional and global ICT hub. I would like to congratulate the Minister of ICT present here today. With the approaching launch of the ASEAN Economic Community, and in implementation of the ASEAN ICT Masterplan 2015, Thailand – as is the case for other countries in the region – is investing in strong telecommunications and ICT infrastructure, and promoting the use of smart networks under its Thailand Smart Community 2018 concept.

At ESCAP, we, too, are working to bring affordable ICT and broadband connectivity to all. From our efforts on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and mapping the regional backbone network, to ICT measurement and capacity-building programmes for member States, our work is aimed at bringing these technologies to all people, all the time, at affordable prices. No one should be left unconnected.

Dr. Touré, I am encouraged by the collaboration between our two organizations as well as our future plans to continue to strengthen our work together, and I am very pleased that we have two new joint project proposals. One is to develop phase II of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway. The second is to assist countries in building statistical capacity on ICT indicators through the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development.

In conclusion, the full potential of ICT will only be realized if transformational technologies are accompanied by shared values, shared commitment, and shared solidarity for inclusive and sustainable development.

I thank you.