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Item 16: Information and Communications Technologies for Development

Statement by
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Mr. Chairman,

My Delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Fiji on behalf of the G-77 & China. Let me outline some of the key areas important to Sri Lanka. The detailed text will be available in PaperSmart.

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank the Secretary General for his very informative reports on this agenda item.

ICT is an essential tool for development across the world. Global leaders, at the Rio+20 Conference, have recognized the need to empower citizens to achieve inclusive sustainable development. ICT infrastructure will play a key role in areas related to the three pillars of Sustainable Development.

The need to enhance ICT development as a catalyst for eradicating poverty and attaining sustainable development is a key concern for States. The key priorities of the MDGs as well as the post-2015 global development agenda, including education, health and poverty reduction will be heavily dependent on global connectivity, content and employment in the ICT sector. The inclusion of ICT related new technologies in the Post-2015 development agenda would certainly bring immense benefit, especially in leap-frogging socio-economic development scenarios, in developing countries.

The GA resolution of 67/195 remains a guideline for Member States to continue the momentum of the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The need for Internet Governance and the equitable distribution of ICT dividends were recognized therein. We also endorse the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 20/8 which declared the internet as a driving force in accelerating progress towards development.
Mr. Chairman,

The commendable progress of ICT in Sri Lanka is a reflection of Sri Lanka's people-centric policies and the "Mahinda Chinthana", the key policy document of the Government, to develop Sri Lanka as the major ICT and knowledge hub in the region. ICT will be a key enabler in transforming Sri Lanka as a dynamic global hub in the Shipping, Aviation, Commercial and Energy sectors.

The creation of the new Ministry of Telecommunication & Information Technology in 2010 is major development. The ICT Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA) serves as the apex delivering arm under the Ministry through the "e-Sri Lanka" program. The "e-Society" Development Initiative of the ICTA has been instrumental in building the capacity of over 400 remote rural communities, of which over 200 communities further benefited through access to information and services in many sectors including health, education, agriculture, fisheries and SMEs. ICTA was the winner of the World Summit Award 2009 for the creation of special software targeted to the visually impaired as well as for services provided by the Government Information Center.

Sri Lanka has addressed the need for relevant capacity building for the productive use of ICT while providing training in ICT skills development including for government officials, teachers and school children. Over 3,500 school ICT laboratories and 700 computer training centers have been established for the project to provide basic and advanced ICT education. Our ICT literacy has increased from 9.7% in 2009 to around 40% in 2013, with a target of 75% by 2016.

Sri Lanka has been progressing well in the telecommunications field. Cellular penetration in the country is now at 110% up from 87.8% in 2011. Internet penetration through mobile broadband connectivity was at 99.3% in 2012. Moreover, the first-ever commercial 4G mobile service in South Asia is now in operation in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has received global recognition for mobile content at the World Summit Award Mobile 2012. Sri Lanka was the only Asian country to be recognized with two winners. Also at the "mBillionth Award" competition for the South Asian region, a product from Sri Lanka was amongst the winners.

The overall effect of ICT development in Sri Lanka since 2006 is manifested in the improving overall trend in Sri Lanka's Network Readiness Index (NRI) ranking published by the World Economic Forum: the NRI shows an increasing trend, from the 83rd position in 2006 to 71st out of 142 in 2012.

Mr. Chairman,

The ICT Agency, together with linguistic specialists and ICT experts in academia and the Sri Lanka Standards Institute facilitate the use of the Unicode facility for Sinhala and Tamil - the two national languages of the country. At present, over 300 websites of government organizations are now
available in these local languages. Soft key pads in Sinhala and Tamil are also now available in mobile devices.

The Island-wide rural telecenter network ("Nenasala" or "wisdom outlets") is a people centric ICT knowledge disseminating mechanism. Mainstreaming indigenous knowledge, content development, delivering e-Government services in the local languages in association with a private-public partnership framework serves as a catalyst for a successful SME model. Women and youth rural leaders are the backbone of the success. 669 telecenters have now been established across Sri Lanka. 40 centers have been established in the Northern Province, transferring ICT skills to a former conflict affected area and narrowing the region’s technology gap with the rest of the country.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me highlight only a few key e-Government success stories of Sri Lanka, under which several strategic projects have been launched:

1. Nearly 500 key government organizations have been interconnected under the Lanka Government Network project (LGN), an IP VPN solution to provide broadband Internet, email and IP based voice services. This creates a single Government information infrastructure. LGN Operations are managed under a private-public partnership model.
2. The "Lanka Gate" project (www.lk), a wide collection of software infrastructure and systems which delivers services and information in Sri Lanka electronically through a comprehensive and integrated platform, has already started issuing revenue licenses online, which is the first transactional eService in the country.
3. The Lanka Government Cloud (LGC), serves as an affordable e Government service infrastructure which hosts a range of Government applications.
4. The Government Information Center (GIC) is another venture where ICT is used to facilitate the flow of information between the government and the public and provides information and eServices through multiple channels. This trilingual call center is a single point of contact for information and guidance for citizen services. A new service, "eServices", was added to the GIC Call Center 1919 in September 2012 with the launch of 22 eServices through Lanka Gate.
5. ePensions project, digitizing birth, marriage and death certificates enabling the issuance of certificates within minutes, and the eCivil Registration System are other main achievements.
6. The hospital health information management system "HHIMS" is now being implemented under a pilot project. Under another project, rural health workers use mobile ICT devices in record management, saving time and effort on exact healthcare service delivery.

ICT backed Business Processes Outsourcing sector is currently the fifth largest income generator of our GDP valued at US$ 600 million at present. The target of the private sector-driven industry conglomerate – SLASSCOM - is to make it a US$ 1 billion industry and the largest contributor to the
economy by 2016. Several Sri Lankan firms provide sophisticated accounting services and financial analytics to global clients as well as legal, architectural, and other high value services. Sri Lanka is among the safe, low-risk emerging markets as Colombo has been rated as the 5th most attractive destination globally for Finance and Accounting by Tholons. The focus is now on strengthening the workforce and creating niche centers of excellence for Finance, Accounting, Banking and Insurance services in the global BPO market.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka is already active regionally and globally, and has ambitious targets to advance further.

1. We are chairing the ESCAP’s ICT Committee for the Asia-Pacific region since 2008.
2. The World Summit Awards have recognized Sri Lanka’s prominence in ICT by selecting Colombo as the venue for its key global event on excellence in e-Content this year from October 23rd to 26th. Among our key strategic partners of this WSA Global Congress are UNESCO, UNDP, UNIDO and the Internet Society.
3. Sri Lanka is an active partner of the international telecenter network, with several technological inputs from our national universities.
4. Improving Reproductive Health Information Access through ICT, www.happylife.lk was satisfactorily implemented in Sri Lanka. It has been duplicated in Afghanistan.
5. Sri Lanka actively supported the Trans-Eurasian ICT connectivity initiative of Azerbaijan.
6. We are actively engaged in programmes of ITU and other international telecommunication bodies. Internet governance is another area of interest. We conducted a productive dialogue with ICANN on this area in June this year.

Mr. Chairman,

The full and effective implementation of World Summit of Information Society (WSIS) remains critical to address the many challenges faced by developing countries in the field of ICT. In this context we underscore the inclusion of ICT in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, especially by recognizing it as one of the sustainable development goals.

Sri Lanka, like many other developing countries, is not an exception to the worst impacts of the recent economic crisis which affected our capacity to mobilize resources and acquire new technologies. In this regard we strongly believe in the strengthening of South-South Cooperation together with the further enhancement of North-South Cooperation in the field of ICT. Assistance in capacity building improvements and mutual understanding of the global connectivity infrastructure is extremely important.

I Thank You.