World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
Asia-Pacific Regional Conference

The Tokyo Declaration
- the Asia-Pacific perspective to the WSIS -

Preamble

Representatives of the governments of 47 countries, 22 international organizations, 54 private sector entities and 116 non-governmental organizations (NGO) of the Asia-Pacific region gathered at the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, held in Tokyo from 13 to 15 January 2003, to develop a shared vision and common strategies for the “Information Society”. The objective of the conference was to discuss how best to work together to contribute to the region’s effective transition to an Information Society that will accelerate and enhance regional economic, social, cultural and technological development.

The conference emphasized that a primary aim of the Information Society must be to facilitate full utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT) at all levels in society and hence enable the sharing of social and economic benefits by all, by means of ubiquitous access to information networks, while preserving diversity and cultural heritage.

The Conference endorsed the important role that ICTs can play in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which describe a fundamental set of principles and guidelines for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and gender inequality.

1. Shared vision of the Information Society

The concept of an Information Society is one in which highly-developed ICT networks, equitable and ubiquitous access to information, appropriate content in accessible formats and effective communication can help people to achieve their potential, promote sustainable economic and social development, improve quality of

life for all, alleviate poverty and hunger, and facilitate participatory decision-making processes. The Information Society in the Asia-Pacific region must:

1) Provide equitable and appropriate access for all to well-developed, affordable and easily-accessed information and communication network infrastructures.

2) Use ICTs as a driving force for the promotion of sustainable economic and technological development by enlarging the gross national product (GNP) through increased technological innovation and continuous research and development resulting in reduced levels of poverty through robust economic growth.

3) Enhance the sharing and strengthening of global knowledge for development by ensuring equitable access to information for educational, scientific, economic, social, political and cultural activities, leading to a vibrant public domain of information.

4) Preserve the rich and diverse cultural heritage and social values of the Asia-Pacific region in the information age.

5) Provide information and communication services targeted at disadvantaged groups in society, in particular those from lower income groups, to contribute to the alleviation of poverty.

6) Use ICTs to strengthen traditional media such as broadcasting and print, which will continue to have an important role in disseminating content in the Information Society.

7) Promote the use of ICTs for capacity-building and human resource development, including ICT literacy, with special reference to the requirements of people with disabilities.

8) Ensure the security and reliability of information and communication networks so as to build confidence and trust in the Information Society.

9) By providing a secure environment for communication, ensure that the use of information and communication services does not place vulnerable groups at risk.

10) Facilitate the important role played by the private sector and civil society in the development of diversified information and communication technologies, networks and services in the Information Society. Concurrently, acknowledge the significant role of governments in terms of creating stakeholder partnerships that engender trust and confidence, promote fair competition, and encourage innovative private sector investment and new initiatives, and promote global and regional cooperation, while protecting consumers and safeguarding public interests.

11) Promote strategies to assess and deal with the environmental impact of ICTs.

12) Continue the ongoing spirit of cooperation and solidarity among the countries of the region.

1. Recognizing the unique features of the Information Society in the Asia–Pacific region

In building an Information Society for the Asia-Pacific region, we should take into account its unique features:

1) Geographic and demographic diversity: The region comprises the earth's largest land mass and vast ocean as well as many small islands. The region has over 65 per cent of the world's population, including over 75 per cent of the world's poor. Many countries of the region have very low population densities spread over large percentages of their areas. Many rural populations are also inaccessible, and have limited contact with other communities.

2) Cultural and linguistic diversity: This region enjoys a richness of ancient and modern cultures, including diverse languages, social traditions and customs. Of the more than 6,800 languages in the world, 3,500 (51 per cent) are spoken in the Asia-Pacific region, including languages without written scripts.

3) Institutional stability: Generally speaking, the region is institutionally stable. Such stability will enable the region to attract more investors, including innovators, entrepreneurs, operators, manufacturers and vendors in the field of ICTs.

4) Productive workforce: the region's economic growth depends on a large, productive workforce capable of fully utilizing ICTs. Given the strong integration of the region into the global economy, this would maintain and enhance the competitive position of its enterprises, leading to the growth of decent employment.

5) Gender issues: Unequal power relations and other social and cultural aspects have contributed to differential access, participation and status for men and women in the region. In this regard, more attention should be given to overcoming these constraints and ensuring that women can equally benefit from the increased use of ICTs for empowerment and full participation in shaping political, economic and social development.

6) Disability issues: There are an estimated 400 million persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region. The majority are poor and have been excluded from the benefits of ICT development due to the lack of appropriate or affordable technology for persons with disabilities. More effort, including implementation of disability-concerned regional plans of action and programmes, should be made to ensure equitable access to ICTs for persons with disabilities.

7) Youth issues: Youth forms the majority of the population in the Asia-Pacific region and is a force for socio-economic development. Equipping young people with knowledge and skills on ICTs to prepare them for full participation in the Information Society is an important goal.

8) Digital divide disparities: In the region as a whole, there is a noticeable disparity in access to, and use of, the latest ICTs, including Internet access and broadband availability, between and within countries. It is recognized that the barriers to equitable access result from differences in education and literacy levels, gender, age, income and connectivity. In this context, particular attention

should be given to least developed countries, economies in transition and post-conflict countries.

9) Imbalance of information flows: While there is substantial internal international trade within the Asia-Pacific, North American and European regions, the same cannot be said for the flow of information between these regions. There is potential for growth in information flows between the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world, as well as between countries within the region.

10) Pioneering role in selected ICT areas: Within the region, some countries have been pioneering, *inter alia*, broadband, satellite and mobile telecommunication services, among others, which are having a significant impact on the way people communicate and on the delivery of government and business services. The experience gained by those countries in this field can be shared with others to promote good practice at local, national, regional and global levels.

11) Special circumstances of regional small island developing States: These countries, vulnerable to environmental hazards, and characterized by small, homogenous markets, high costs of access and equipment, human resource constraints exacerbated by the problem of “brain-drain”, limited access to networks and remote locations, will require particular attention and tailored solutions to meet their needs.

2. Advancing the region’s Information Society

In order to promote the development and advancement of the Information Society, it is necessary to address many issues, within and across sectors, while ensuring that the essential platform of ICT infrastructure and services, standards and innovation is established.

(1) Priority areas for action

a) Infrastructure development

The development of the Information Society must be based on platforms of internationally interoperable technical standards, accessible for all, and technological innovation of ICTs, as well as systems to promote the exchange of knowledge at global, regional and subregional levels through any media. In this regard, in addition to enhancing people's awareness of the advantages of using ICTs, reliable, advanced and appropriate, ICT technologies and services infrastructure are required.

As a sharp increase in the volume of international and regional Internet traffic is anticipated, it is important to strengthen regional and international broadband network infrastructure by using new technologies to enhance network efficiency and provide the capacity to match the needs of the countries in the region.

Working towards open and flexible international and interoperable standards is an important issue for all countries so as to ensure that all can utilize the technology and associated content and services to their maximum potential. Development and deployment of open-source software should be encouraged, as appropriate, as should open standards for ICT networking.

b) Securing affordable, universal access to ICTs

In order to achieve affordable and universal access it is important to enable existing and new technologies to provide connectivity to all, in particular through institutions accessible to the public such as schools, libraries, post offices and multi-purpose community centres. Special attention should be paid to how ICTs can benefit the disadvantaged, through innovative initiatives.

High-quality access, attainable through broadband, has great potential to help better deliver essential services required to meet basic human needs through applications such as e-education and e-health, as well as e-business and other ICT applications. Also, new technologies, such as wireless and satellite networks can assist remote areas, including small island nations, to gain access to information and knowledge.

c) Preserving linguistic and cultural diversity and promoting local content

Linguistic and cultural diversity enriches the development of society by giving expression to a range of different values and ideas. It can facilitate the spread and use of information by presenting it in the language and cultural context most familiar to the user, thereby further encouraging the use of ICTs.

Promoting broadband networks in the Asia-Pacific region could not only support research, business and personal activities, but also help to preserve cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge and traditions. In this context, an effort should be made to support multilingual domain names, local content development, digital archives, diverse forms of digital media, content translation and adaptation. The development of standard and recognized character sets and language codes should also be supported.

d) Developing human resources

In order for people to make the most of the Information Society, they must have enhanced levels of ICT literacy and ICT skills. To achieve this, relevant education and training should be promoted at every level, from primary to adult, to open up opportunities for as many people as possible, and especially for the disadvantaged. The capacity of developing and least developed countries to apply ICTs effectively must be enhanced through regional and international cooperation.

ICTs can contribute to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, and the sharing of knowledge and information. Teachers act as a gateway to the Information Society, and their skills development and curriculum resources need increased support.

It is also important to improve both basic and advanced education in science and technology. This will help to create a critical mass of highly qualified and skilled ICT professionals and experts that will continue to serve as a foundation for the region's ICT development. It is recognized that education in network infrastructure development and operation is of particular importance, and is critical to the availability of efficient, reliable, competitive and secure ICT network services.

e) Establishing legal, regulatory and policy frameworks

The transition to the Information Society requires the creation of appropriate and transparent legal, regulatory and policy frameworks at the global, regional and national levels. These frameworks should give due regard to the rights and obligations of all

stakeholders in such areas as freedom of expression, privacy, security, management of Internet addresses and domain names, and consumer protection, while also maintaining economic incentives and ensuring trust and confidence for business activities. In order to secure prompt settlement of disputes, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) should be considered along with normal judicial proceedings.

f) Ensuring balance between intellectual property rights (IPR) and public interest

While intellectual property rights play a vital role in fostering innovation in software, e-commerce and associated trade and investment, there is a need to promote initiatives to ensure fair balance between IPRs and the interests of the users of information, while also taking into consideration the global consensus achieved on IPR issues in multilateral organizations.

Copyright holders and distributors of content should be cognizant of the need to ensure that content is accessible for all, including persons with disabilities. In this connection, access requirements should be included in legal, regulatory and policy frameworks, where appropriate.

g) Ensuring the security of ICTs

Among the challenges to the region are the general lack of awareness of information security issues, the rapidly evolving complexity, capacity and reach of information technology, the anonymity offered by these technologies, and the transnational nature of communication frameworks. Recognizing the principle of fair, equitable and appropriate access to ICTs for all countries, special attention should be paid to the fact that ICTs can potentially be used for purposes that are inconsistent with the objectives of maintaining international stability and security, and may adversely affect the integrity of the infrastructure within States, to the detriment of their security in both civil and military fields. A multi-pronged approach is needed to address these challenges, and cybercrime, on all fronts, with emphasis on preventive approaches, national guidelines and regional and international cooperation. At the same time, action to address cybercrime and to ensure a safe and secure Information Society must respect the sovereignty of nations and maintain respect for the constitutional and other rights of all persons, including freedom of expression.

All stakeholders concerned with ICT issues should take the necessary steps to enhance security, user confidence and other aspects of information and system/network integrity in order to avoid the risk of wholesale disruption and destruction of the network systems on which they are increasingly dependent.

Effective information security could be guaranteed not only by technology, but also by education and training, policy and law, and international cooperation. In the long term, development of a “global culture of cybersecurity”, based on a common understanding of regulations and appropriate mechanisms for information and technology exchange and international cooperation, should be promoted.

h) Fostering partnerships and mobilizing resources

The private sector plays an important role in the development and diffusion of ICTs, while civil society, including NGOs, works closely with communities in strengthening ICT-related initiatives. Increased cooperation and partnerships are needed between governmental and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and civil society, for effective design and implementation of various initiatives, by giving priority to locally-available human resources. All stakeholders are urged to mobilize resources for the development of the Information Society, including through increasing investment in telecommunication infrastructure, human capacity building, policy frameworks and the development of culturally sensitive local content and applications. International and regional organizations, including financial and development institutions, have an important role to play in integrating the use of ICTs in the development process and making available the necessary resources for this purpose.

(2) Cross-sectoral priority programmes and activities

To make significant progress, all countries of the region will need to mainstream ICTs, with special reference to gender, within their national and regional development strategies, and across all sectors.

In this context, the following initiatives can support social and economic development, including the emergence of e-communities, while at the same time ensuring that traditional models are recognized and respected, so that the non-users of ICTs are not marginalized.

a) e-government

ICT networks can offer better public services to citizens by more efficient and effective dissemination of information and delivery of essential government services.

E-government can also generate a greater sense of community participation, and improve informed decision-making and development programme implementation.

b) e-business

Through the application of ICT, businesses in all sectors can achieve increased productivity and profitability, reach wider markets, lower their transaction costs and control inventories more effectively. On the consumer side, ICTs can bring to consumers greater satisfaction through their interaction with many potential suppliers, beyond the constraints of location.

c) e-learning

Access to education and knowledge is essential for economic, social and cultural development, and as a means of personal empowerment, community development and business efficiency. ICT networks have the potential to offer unprecedented educational opportunities to all groups in all areas of the Asia-Pacific region. Implementation of affordable and universal educational programmes, content, broadband networks and hardware should be promoted.

d) e-health

Access to healthcare information and services is a basic right. Many countries lack adequate healthcare facilities and personnel, particularly in rural and remote areas. The use of ICTs promotes social inclusion of all members of society by enabling equitable access to healthcare services, as well as empowering citizens to better manage their own health and to participate more effectively in the healthcare process.

e) Community information and communication centres

Community information and communication centres are critical to ensure inclusive access to information and social services, particularly in rural areas.

(3) National and regional e-strategies

Comprehensive ICT strategies that have been endorsed at the highest political levels and that include clear goals need to be formulated at community, national, regional and global levels in order to create the Information Society. These strategies will be encouraged to be designed and implemented through collaboration and

participation of all stakeholders. In this regard, awareness of the vast potential of the positive use of ICTs should be promoted among all concerned.

3. Conclusion

This Declaration was adopted at the conclusion of the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference and will be submitted as the Asia-Pacific region's input to the WSIS process. Furthermore, the Conference recognizes the importance of the declaration and plan of action resulting from the WSIS process, taking into account internationally agreed goals, including those of the Millennium Declaration.