Economic and Social Council

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Information and Communications Technology

Fourth session
Bangkok, 14-16 October 2014
Items 2 and 3 of the provisional agenda[*]
**Asian Information Superhighway: seamless connectivity
for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific**

Harnessing cross-sectoral infrastructure synergies

Note verbale dated 10 October 2014 from the Government of Bhutan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, addressed to the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Bhutan presents its compliments to the secretariat of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and has the honour to transmit herewith the text of the Paro Outcome Statement of the Expert Consultation on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and Regional Connectivity, held in Paro, Bhutan, on 1 and 2 October 2014, and further requests that the outcome statement be brought to the attention of the ESCAP Committee on Information and Communications Technology at its fourth session during consideration of items 2 and 3 of the provisional agenda.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bhutan, avails itself of the opportunity to renew to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific the assurances of its highest consideration.

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[*]   E/ESCAP/CICT(4)/L.1.

Annex to the note verbale dated 10 October 2014 from the Government of Bhutan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, addressed to the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific[*]

Paro Outcome Statement of the
Expert Consultation on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway
and Regional Connectivity

We, the representatives of the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, representatives of the Secretariat of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and LIRNEasia, assembled in Paro, Bhutan, on 1 and 2 October 2014, for the Expert Consultation on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and Regional Connectivity, within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative,

I.   Preamble

Emphasizing the importance of improving connectivity and telecommunications transit routes in the region, including terrestrial and seabed connections,

Acknowledging the importance of information and communications technology (ICT) as a meta-infrastructure that enhances efficiencies across all infrastructures, increases economy-wide productivity and global competitiveness of countries in Asia and the Pacific,

Recalling Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) resolution 69/10 on promoting regional connectivity and building knowledge-networked societies in Asia and the Pacific, in which members and associate members agreed to implement information and communications technology policies that promote social and economic development,

Reaffirming the declaration by Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development that it is essential to work towards improved access to information and communications technology, especially broadband networks and services, and bridge the digital divide to facilitate the flow of information between Governments and the public,

Expressing concern in this regard that there is limited development of Internet backbone and cross-border connectivity in the region and that less than 4 per cent of the population in South and South-West Asia has access to broadband Internet that is high speed, reliable and affordable,

Emphasizing the need to enhance regional and international connectivity across Asia, including through the development of competitive telecommunications markets, investments in information and communications technology infrastructure, and improvements in international telecommunications connectivity,

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[*]   Annex has been issued without formal editing.

Recognizing that improved telecommunications connectivity across Asia and the Pacific will create new links with regional and global knowledge hubs and offer potential revenue-earning opportunities for international, regional and domestic telecommunications operators,

Also recognizing the importance of enabling environments to promote competition and enable private investment in the development, deployment and operation of information and communications technology infrastructure, as well as associated services and content, for the achievement of reliable, affordable and universal access to and use of information and communications technology,

Further recognizing that Asian landlocked countries, such as Bhutan, are faced with exceptionally high international prices for the transit of the Internet Protocol, and that these prices are associated with high consumer prices, unaffordable and poor-quality connectivity services, especially for broadband,

Noting the need to create an enabling environment for private investment and to increase the availability of and access to financing for information and communications technology projects in developing countries in Asia and the Pacific, especially those that link least developed and landlocked developing countries with each other, and with other economies in Asia and the Pacific,

Recognizing the benefits of coordinating the planning and deployment of infrastructure across the information and communications technology, transport and energy sectors, including increased construction efficiency, improved service reliability and enhanced financial, environmental and operational sustainability,

Also recognizing the seamless regional connectivity in land transport offered by the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway network agreements, as well as the opportunity for promoting cross-sectoral infrastructure planning,

II.   Policy recommendations

Resolve to work together, including through existing and planned global, regional and national partnerships, to bring reliable and affordable broadband Internet services to all people in Asia and the Pacific;

Also resolve to prioritize promotion of market competition, open access and non-discriminatory pricing in the development of regional telecommunications infrastructure, and to collaborate with international, regional and domestic carriers to improve international telecommunications connectivity;

Further resolve to leverage existing regional connectivity opportunities offered by the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks in order to utilize the right of way of existing and planned transport networks and achieve rapid, cost-effective deployment of optical fibre across and within countries;

Agree to exchange information and knowledge, best practices and regional experiences related to the policies and programmes to promote the development of the information and communications technology sector;

Also agree to identify measures to develop international telecommunications connectivity in Asia and the Pacific through a mix of policy and regulatory reforms and partnerships, with a view towards developing competitive markets and creating open-access networks;

Call on Asia-Pacific regional cooperation organizations, including subregional organizations, such as BIMSTEC, ECO and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and regional policy think tanks, such as LIRNEasia, to facilitate regional cooperation in ICT infrastructure and promote regional connectivity as a regional public good;

Request all regional cooperation organizations in Asia and the Pacific, especially BIMSTEC, ECO and SAARC, to actively facilitate regional cooperation in ICT infrastructure and promote regional connectivity as a regional public good, as well as an integral component of the regional integration process in their respective regions;

Agree to propose to the ESCAP Committee on Information and Communications Technology and the Committee on Transport at their fourth sessions, respectively, that, through its relevant working groups, the intergovernmental agreements of ESCAP should make provisions for the synchronized deployment of infrastructure along transport networks;

Also agree to support, at the fourth session of the ESCAP Committee on Information and Communications Technology, from 14 to 16 October 2014, the establishment of a working group on enhancing international telecommunications connectivity in Asia and the Pacific;

Call on ESCAP to conduct a series of in-depth analytical studies and continue updating ESCAP-International Telecommunication Union broadband backbone network maps and hold expert consultations in order to initiate the Asia-Pacific information superhighway;

Also call on ESCAP to support member States in the development of an Asia-Pacific connectivity proposal, including specific policy reforms, to promote competition and open access, to create the enabling environment for private investment and then to identify specific residual gaps in financing.

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