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DRAFT REPORT

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I. MATTERS CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE COMMISSION OR BROUGHT TO ITS ATTENTION

See E/ESCAP/CICT/L.3/Add.1

II. PROCEEDINGS

A. World Summit on the Information Society five years on: information and communications technology for inclusive development

1. The Committee had before it the document entitled “World Summit on the Information Society Five Years on: information and communications technology for inclusive development” (E/ESCAP/CICT/1), which addressed some key challenges faced by the Asia-Pacific region in developing an inclusive and development-oriented information society, as envisioned in the outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society.¹

2. Several delegations recognized information and communications technology (ICT) as a fundamental enabler of socio-economic development and described their national ICT strategies, plans and programmes, and their recent achievements in formulating enabling policies, implementing national ICT strategies and relevant plans and programmes, providing ICT connectivity to underserved areas, making access to information networks affordable, and utilizing ICT applications to stimulate economic and social development and the growth of the ICT sector.

3. Several delegations emphasized the importance of implementing the recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society and reviewing progress in the Asia-Pacific region. Some delegations emphasized that the implementation of related activities should be done in close coordination with other United Nations organizations and civil society.

4. Several delegations encouraged the secretariat to continue its efforts (a) to bridge the digital divide between nations and within communities, and (b) to support the capacity-building efforts of developing countries, especially least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, in the area of ICT policy and applications, including the establishment of community e-centres.

5. Several delegations expressed concern that, despite various efforts at the national and regional levels, there was still a large digital divide between developed and developing countries, and between urban and rural populations. In that regard, the current level of ICT access, especially in least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, might not be sufficient to achieve the goals of the World Summit on the Information Society or the Millennium Development Goals.

¹ The Declaration of Principles and the Geneva Plan of Action (A/C.2/59/3, annex) and the Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda (see A/60/687).

6. Several delegations expressed concern that, despite reports of success with community e-centres in many countries of region, there were still several challenges to understand and overcome, including the problems of sustainability and scalability, especially for centres located in remote and rural areas. One representative noted that member States should keep in mind the long-term funding requirements to sustain the community e-centres being implemented as well as those already in existence.

7. Several delegations recognized the critical importance of promoting the exchange of information and best practices at the regional level, of facilitating policy debate on the use of ICT for development, and of promoting cooperation among all stakeholders in collectively transforming the digital divide into digital opportunities and bringing the benefits of ICT to all. Asia-Pacific regional cooperation could focus on maximizing connectivity and ICT access at the national level as well as the use of such resources as e-education, e-health, e-agriculture and e-business applications so that all countries in the region might benefit economically and socially from those technological advances.

8. Several delegations emphasized the importance of human resources development activities in fostering ICT applications for development in such areas as policy, e-commerce, e-government, e-health and e-agriculture. Those delegations also recognized the opportunity for cooperation with the Asian and Pacific Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT). The delegations also recognized the value of knowledge sharing among member States. Some delegations offered to share their country experiences and knowledge on various issues related to community e-centres and other aspects of information and communications technology for development.

9. Several delegations encouraged the secretariat to continue its efforts to expand Pacific connectivity, especially an in-depth study on financing mechanisms and options for deploying satellite technologies.

10. One delegation informed the Committee of its view that the private sector should play a leading role in the development and application of ICT. The delegation also mentioned that its Government provided developing countries with development assistance in fields where the private sector encountered difficulties, such as infrastructure development and capacity-building. The delegation requested that the Committee take care to avoid duplicating the work of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity. Another delegation expressed the view that the secretariat should pay more attention to public-private partnerships, which might attract considerable investment to the ICT sector.

11. One delegation, while expressing satisfaction with the secretariat's timely provision of most Committee documents, noticed two exceptions. The delegation indicated that it would be expedient for the secretariat to focus its future activities on the goals stated in the Commission resolution 64/1 and expressed the view that some practical aspects of ICT development, such as investment promotion, were not sufficiently reflected in the Committee documents, including the strategic

framework for 2010-2011 (E/ESCAP/CICT/5). The delegation suggested that practical results could be achieved if priority projects could be identified for financing, and if the secretariat could undertake research to identify the ICT development factors that made a positive contribution to different aspects of economic and social development. The delegation held the view that more attention should be given to the quality of the ICT services provided, in particular concerning the issues of ensuring the security of ICT infrastructure and preventing its use to spread the ideology of terrorism and extremism and the propaganda of violence. The delegation accorded importance to tasks related to the World Summit on the Information Society in the region.

12. One delegation expressed a strong interest in documenting best practices and lessons learned regarding the planning, implementation and sustainability of community e-centres.

13. One delegation requested for experience-sharing from field visits to be organized in 2009 on the development of community e-centres either in India or Sri Lanka. The committee noted Sri Lanka's offer to host such activity.

14. The representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic stated that his country wished to make use of ICT in its efforts to tap its abundant hydropower with a view to becoming the "battery" of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and to transform itself from landlocked to land-linked.

15. One delegation reminded the Committee that the activities proposed in the document, if approved, should be carried out within existing resources.

16. One delegation stressed the importance of using ICT and leveraging its geographical location in the construction of physical routes between the two large economic groupings of Europe and the Pacific Rim.

17. One delegation requested that the secretariat consider the standards and indicators of ICT for development developed by some intergovernmental organizations, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

18. The Committee also had before it the background information document entitled "Information and communications technology for food security and sustainable agriculture in the knowledge economy" (E/ESCAP/CICT/INF/1).

19. Several delegations commended the secretariat for the quality of the background information and expressed their appreciation of the vital role of ICT in supporting sustainable agriculture and food security.

20. Several delegations noted that ICT played important role in sustainable agriculture and food security by enhancing agricultural productivity. Increased knowledge of food production systems

obtained through e-learning and access to data on best practices enabled international, regional and national expertise to trickle down local levels.

21. Several delegations observed that many countries in the region had established online networks, often called agricultural expert systems, at the national, provincial and community levels. Those networks provided useful information on agricultural production, marketing, technological developments, weather forecasts and disaster management.

22. Several delegations noted that keeping up with to the rapid development of information and communications technology and other cutting-edge technologies was of particular importance to the Asia-Pacific region, where agriculture remained dominant.

23. The delegation of Sri Lanka informed the Committee that its country had addressed the issue of food security within the framework of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

B. Information and communications technology-enabled disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific

24. The Committee had before it the document entitled "Information and communications technology-enabled disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific" (E/ESCAP/CICT/2).

25. Several delegations expressed support for the priority issues described in document E/ESCAP/CICT/2. In addition, several delegations recognized the need for a regional network of all disaster information sharing networks, addressing multi-hazards, and, in that regard, called on the secretariat to promote such a network on information sharing and analysis for disaster risk reduction in collaboration with other international and regional partners working in that field.

26. Some delegations noted that ICT, including space technology, was an important tool for assisting in all phases of disaster risk management, which covered mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery from disasters.

27. One delegation noted with appreciation the establishment of both the committees on Information and Communications Technology and on Disaster Risk Reduction. Some delegations welcomed the recent establishment of the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division of the secretariat.

28. Several delegations noted that, in order to reduce the risk of disasters, regional cooperation was critical, especially for developing countries, which had less capacity to manage the risk of disaster.

29. Some delegations noted that regional cooperative mechanisms must take into account the overall capacity, the technological and institutional infrastructure, the enabling policy environment, and the economic and social disparities among countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

30. One delegation noted with appreciation the work of the secretariat on capacity-building in the use of ICT for disaster management, especially at the institutional and technical levels.

31. One delegation noted that the secretariat, including APCICT and the network established under the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development (RESAP), could further contribute to building the capacities of member countries at the policy, institutional and technical levels to address the integrated use of ICT for disaster risk reduction, in cooperation with relevant organizations that have capacity-building programmes.

32. Several delegations reported on national initiatives regarding the use of ICT for disaster risk reduction. The delegation of the Russian Federation shared that country's experience with a comprehensive national system of disaster early warning. The delegation of Japan informed the Committee of an initiative on a global flood alert system using both satellite and ground-based technologies. It also informed the Committee that it had supported training workshops for disaster management personnel from developing countries. It then informed the Committee of "Sentinel Asia" (see <http://dmss.tksc.jaxa.jp/sentinel>), an initiative begun in October 2006 which currently benefited from the participation of 20 countries and dozens of institutions and international organizations. The delegation of China reported on the country's experience in applying ICT for disaster risk reduction during a severe snowstorm earlier in the year, and the unprecedented earthquake in Sichuan Province in May 2008. The delegation reported its use of a satellite navigation system, un-manned aerial photography, satellite telephony and spatial information systems to support timely and effective responses to such disasters. The delegation of Sri Lanka informed the Committee of its efforts to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action² since 2006 and of its plan to use telecentres for disaster risk reduction activities.

33. One delegation expressed support for the outputs proposed for the strategic framework for 2010-2011, as contained in document E/ESCAP/CICT/5. The delegation recommended that, in the implementation of those outputs, greater consideration should be given to countries with special needs, especially in institutional capacity-building and human resources development in ICT and disaster risk reduction.

34. One delegation supported the work of the secretariat on follow-up to the implementation of Hyogo Framework for Action, through interactions between the ESCAP secretariat and members of the Commission, and among members themselves, in close cooperation with organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

35. One delegation suggested giving special attention to the application of telecentres for disaster risk reduction and other emerging issues, such as food security. One delegation requested that the secretariat conduct a study on increasing the value of ICT applications for disaster risk reduction.

² Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (A/CONF.206/6 and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2).

36. One delegation requested that the secretariat support regional cooperation in the development and sharing of information, communications and space infrastructure and resources.

37. Some delegations expressed support for regional cooperation in developing a regional emergency communications system.

38. One delegation requested that the secretariat explore alternative means of developing a regional emergency communications system within the existing budgetary resources of the secretariat.

39. Some delegations requested that the secretariat support regional cooperation in capacity-building in the use of ICT for disaster management.

40. One delegation reminded the Committee that established organizations, such as the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), had been active in the region for many years and should be made partners in the relevant activities of the ESCAP secretariat.

C. Strategy of regional institutions on information and communications technology

41. The Committee had before it two documents on the agenda item: the report of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (E/ESCAP/CICT/3), and the report of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (E/ESCAP/CICT/4).

42. Several delegations commended the work carried out by the two centres and expressed their deep gratitude to their host countries, India and the Republic of Korea, for providing the centres with continued support. In that regard, they called for more support from the region.

43. Several delegations recognized the importance of developing human resources in ICT for the purpose of bridging the digital divide among and within the countries of the region. Some delegations noted with appreciation the work of APCICT in developing human resources and building institutional capacities in ESCAP developing member countries since its inception in 2005. One delegation expressed its hope that APCICT would become a regional hub for ICT capacity-building and promote regional cooperation therein.

44. In view of the new orientation mandated by the Commission in its resolution 64/1, in particular the recognition of the importance of the link between ICT and disaster risk reduction as part of the work of the Committee, several delegations emphasized that APCICT should play a key role in meeting the emerging needs of member States in the area of ICT human resources development for disaster risk reduction.

45. Several delegations noted with appreciation the work of APCTT in technology transfer and small business development for the benefit of ESCAP members.

46. Some delegations commended the Government of India for considering funding the second phase of the project on national innovation systems, which included the transfer of publicly funded

and environmentally sound technologies. The project would support the initiatives of the secretariat on energy security, food security and climate change by promoting collaborative research and development and by fostering open innovation throughout the region.

47. Noting that APCTT would contribute to the subprogramme on trade and investment in the biennium 2010-2011, several delegations expressed the view that the mandate of APCTT was more relevant to the work of the subprogramme on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction. Those delegations recommended that APCTT continue its contribution as usual to that subprogramme in the biennium 2010-2011 and thereafter.

48. One delegation informed the Committee that it was in dire need of assistance from APCTT regarding knowledge and technology transfer, and requested that APCTT continue its assistance in capacity development.

D. Other matters

49. The Committee was informed of the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on WSIS+5 and Emerging Issues in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok on 18 and 19 November, by the Chairperson, who had served as a moderator.

50. A special pre-session presentation was given by a professor from the University of Tokyo on important issues related to disaster mitigation and integrated information systems for total disaster management. Participants made very positive comments.

51. A side event was held to launch the Asia-Pacific Telecentre Network. The event was attended by many participants and other partners, including non-governmental organizations and private sector organizations.

E. Adoption of the report

52. The Committee adopted the report on its first session on 21 November 2008.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. Opening, duration and organization of the session

53. The Committee on Information and Communications Technology held its first session in Bangkok from 19 to 21 November 2008. It was declared open by the Minister of Information and Communication Technology of Thailand.

54. The Executive Secretary of ESCAP, in her opening statement, highlighted some issues on the development and applications of information and communications technology (ICT) and challenges faced in the region. She noted that, despite all the impressive technological advances and commitments of key players in the region, access to ICT services and applications was still out of reach for the vast majority of people, especially the poor. The secretariat would continue efforts to

mainstream ICT for inclusive and sustainable development, focusing on four Cs: connectivity, capacity, content and collaboration. She believed that the secretariat, in partnership with other United Nations agencies, international organizations, partners and stakeholders, could play a critical role in collective efforts to bridge the digital divide.

55. The secretariat had, in the past, focused on helping countries to address the issue of rural ICT access, and it wished to provide further assistance in that area by analysing the strength and sustainability of community e-centres. It would continue its efforts to assist Pacific island developing States in tackling the challenges of ICT connectivity. The Executive Secretary informed the Committee of the planned efforts of the secretariat in the area of disaster risk reduction, particularly in the use of ICT—including space-based technology—as an indispensable tool throughout the whole process of disaster management. She also noted that the Commission had decided to focus on sustainable agriculture and food security at its next annual session and that ICT had a central role to play in promoting food security.

56. The Minister of Information and Communication Technology of Thailand noted that ICT was one of the driving forces of economic growth. Thailand had been implementing the National Information Technology Policy Framework, which ran from 2001 to 2010, to maximize the potential of ICT, with a focus on fostering ICT applications for national sustainable development. ESCAP had been the regional forum for addressing such issues, with the goal of creating an inclusive and development-oriented information society for the region. The secretariat had been a tireless advocate of the distributive role of Governments in promoting access to ICT by all citizens, regardless of where they lived or what their economic situation was. In that connection, telecentres had been an important tool in extending ICT access to rural and disadvantaged communities.

57. The Minister noted that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology of Thailand had supported the establishment of more than 200 telecentres all over the country. He expressed appreciation for the work of the secretariat in facilitating the networking of Thai telecentres with other telecentre networks in the Asia-Pacific region. He noted that the secretariat had also spearheaded discussions related to Pacific connectivity and he praised the work of ESCAP in advocating the urgent need to connect the Pacific islands with affordable information and communications technology. The secretariat had been expeditious in aligning its work with priority issues that were high on the agendas of ESCAP members.

B. Attendance

58. Representatives of following members and associate members of ESCAP attended the meeting: Azerbaijan, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Thailand and United States of America.

59. In addition, representatives of the following countries attended: Bulgaria, Germany and South Africa.

60. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies attended: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT).

61. Representatives of the following specialized agencies and related organizations attended: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Bank and International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

62. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU), Asian Reinsurance Corporation (ARC), Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), Coordinating Committee for Geoscience Programmes in East and Southeast Asia (CCOP) Technical Secretariat, Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) Secretariat, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and Universal Postal Union (UPU).

63. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC) and Zonta International (District 17) (ZI).

64. Other entities represented included: Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), iBurst Association (iBA), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCS), Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), Microsoft Operations Pte. Ltd. and University of Tokyo.

C. Election of officers

65. Mr. Lalith Weeratunga (Sri Lanka) was elected Chairperson. Mr. Rufat Gulmammadov (Azerbaijan) was elected Vice-Chairperson and Ms. Normala Sharom (Malaysia) was elected Rapporteur.

D. Agenda

66. The Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. World Summit on the Information Society five years on: information and communications technology for inclusive development.
5. Information and communications technology-enabled disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific.

6. Strategy of regional institutions on information and communications technology.
7. Other matters.
8. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its first session.

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