



**ASIA-PACIFIC TELECOMMUNITY**

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**INAUGURAL ADDRESS**

**BY**

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INFOCOMM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OF SINGAPORE**

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**Inaugural Address by Ms Jacqueline Poh, Managing Director, Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore at the Asia Pacific Telecommunity Policy and Regulatory Forum on 3 August 2015, 9.30am at Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel, Singapore**

Ms. Areewan Haorangsi  
Secretary-General of the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT),

Mr. Ioane Koroivuki  
Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, International Telecommunication Union (ITU),

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the APT Policy and Regulatory Forum. This is the second time Singapore is hosting the APT PRF after a ten-year hiatus, and we are extremely honoured by the trust and confidence that you have all placed on us to host this prestigious event yet again.

2 I am delighted to see so many APT Members and participants from the industry, who have gathered here to share your unique experiences and insights into telecoms policy and regulatory issues of concern to our Asia-Pacific region. Under the leadership of Ms Areewan, IDA has worked closely with the APT Secretariat to put together an agenda that we hope is both forward looking and relevant, centred around the timely theme of “*Building a Smart Digital Economy through ICT*”.

3 Today, everyone is connected. The smartphone has significantly transformed how we live, work and play. The Pew Research Centre reports that 46% of smartphone owners say that their smartphone is something “*they could not live without*”. Global mobile data traffic is expected to grow by between 40% and 60% over the next few years. These are good news for the mobile market, as it means more business opportunities for growth areas such as IOT and Machine-to-Machine communications. According to ITU projections, the Asia Pacific is home to 52% of the world’s mobile cellular subscriptions, and almost half of the world’s Internet users. The Asia Pacific region contains all the ingredients to be the hub for the development of the digital economy if we seize the opportunities available to us.

4 In this context, I found it interesting that the theme of this conference centres around the verb ‘building’. Most regulators think of themselves as a good policy formulators or fair arbitrators or efficient implementers. In IDA, for example, we strive to create a conducive infocomm environment that is both pro-consumer and pro-business.

5 But to Build a Smart Nation or to Build a Digital Economy takes a different attitude to innovation. Some say regulations and policy are a hindrance to innovation. I would beg to differ. Regulations and policies are not necessarily the enemy of innovation. If properly thought-through, policy can provide a framework for innovation to occur. In many cases, the innovation cannot take place without regulation. Let me share three examples with you.

6 First, what is the role of the telecoms regulator to build a better broadband infrastructure? We have learnt that this requires active commercial players but cannot rely solely on market forces. Some years ago, Singapore embarked on an effort to ensure that fixed high-speed fibre broadband would be available to all, residential and non-residential premises, rich and poor. The Nationwide Broadband Network was built with a combination of government subsidies and industry participation in an innovative structure that involved operational and structural separation of the fibre network owning, Opco owning and retail service provider layers.

7 From Singapore’s experience, the entry of new broadband Retail Service Providers offering services over our nationwide fibre network has certainly led to more innovative broadband packages at competitive prices. As the number of RSPs increased from 3 in 2011 to 29 in 2015, the prices of broadband packages have been dropping and niche offerings to groups like gamers have arisen. Today, many Singapore households enjoy 1GB data plans for under US\$29/month. The developmental regulation of this fixed Nationwide Broadband Network has allowed us to close the digital divide by offering 100 MB plans together with free phablets for just US\$3 a month to our most underprivileged and needy citizens.

8 More recently, IDA has responded to interest by potential new entrants seeking to bring more competition and innovation to the mobile broadband market. We plan to conduct a spectrum allocation exercise in early 2016 to make available a total of 225 MHz of spectrum for mobile services. This includes spectrum in the 700 MHz band, which will be freed after the digital TV switch over. Acknowledging that any

committed new entrant is likely to face high entry barriers given the significant upfront capital investments required to deploy nationwide services in a country that already has 3 mobile players, IDA is proposing to set aside 60 MHz out of the 225 MHz of spectrum at a lower indicative reserve package price, for a spectrum auction open only to potential new entrants. This new entrant is required to deploy its own network and achieve nationwide rollout by September 2018. The hope is that these measures will provide competition for the market to flourish.

9 My second example of developmental regulation is still work in progress. What is the role of regulation in building a Smart Nation where technology is pervasive and data is used ubiquitously to improve lives? When Singapore announced its Smart Nation vision last year, there was a lot of focus on elements like data sharing and exchange, analytics and new cutting edge technologies such as autonomous vehicles. Innovation is the key to Singapore's push to becoming a Smart Nation. But innovation cannot take place in a vacuum – citizens must be assured that the connectivity in a Smart Nation is resilient and reliable. It is fair for them to expect data collected to be protected, and that the necessary privacy measures are put in place. It is critical that increasingly ICT-enabled systems are not victims of cyberattack and that critical data is not stolen in cyber breaches. We are therefore putting a lot of effort into building an equally robust regulatory and policy framework that addresses questions around data protection, privacy and cybersecurity in a Smart Nation.

10 Thirdly, I ask myself what is the role of the regulator in the most innovative and exciting part of the stack – building applications? A vibrant digital economy needs compelling applications and use cases; it is not just about infrastructure; as well as smooth transmission through networks. The best thing that regulation can provide in this area is a common set of standards, for example standards for M2M communications. In Singapore, for instance, we have recently announced our first public housing precincts to be Smart Home enabled.

### **APT expands its Influence beyond the Region**

11 36 years after its creation, the APT remains critical in advancing the efficiency of international communications. We are glad to see that the APT has also been responding proactively to the need for regulators to think about setting rules, policies and standards to support Building Connectivity and ultimately Building Innovation. On a regional level, momentum behind the APT 700 MHz band plan is increasing. The Middle East and Africa have strong interest in APT FDD. Latin America is seeing

widespread FDD adoption. Numerous countries beyond the Asia Pacific are committing to the APT plan or recommending its adoption. Singapore is very happy that the benefits of the APT plan are being appreciated around the world. It is a great testimony to the ability of APT to offer concrete benefits beyond our region and make a difference to the world.

## **Closing**

12 Today, I wish to acknowledge APT for its continued dedication to coordinate with countries in the region and provide useful input to ITU through its Conferences. For our part, Singapore looks to the APT to continue supporting the ITU's international efforts by being a major voice for this region in the larger global debate. We will do our part, as a responsible member country, to contribute within our capability.

13 I take this opportunity to express my hope that this Forum will be a useful platform for us to step up efforts to improve the Asia Pacific region through ICT. I wish you all success in your efforts, and hope that you will find your stay in Singapore fruitful and enjoyable.

Thank you.