



Secretary General

WELCOME ADDRESS

Your Excellency S. Iswaran, Minister of Communications and Information of Singapore,
Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia
and the Pacific (ESCAP),

Mr. Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General of International Telecommunication Union (ITU),
Mr. Tan Kiat How, Chief Executive of Infocomm Media Development Authority of Singapore
(IMDA),

Honourable Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers, Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

On behalf of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), it is indeed a privilege and a great honour for me to warmly welcome you to the Asia-Pacific ICT Ministerial Meeting on “Co-creating a Connected Digital Future in the Asia-Pacific” in this dynamic and vibrant country of Singapore.

We are very honoured by the presence of the honourable Prime Minister, Ministers and Vice-Ministers at this memorable occasion. I wish to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to all of you for taking time to be here in this auspicious gathering despite your busy schedule and engagement in your respective country. Your presence reinforces the commitment to collaborate and cooperate as we move forward in co-creating a connected digital future in the Asia-Pacific region.

I would like to sincerely thank Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP and Mr. Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for being here with us. ESCAP and ITU are the two founding organizations of the APT and the presence of both of you here is invaluable to the APT.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my profound appreciation to our host, the Government of Singapore, in particular, the Ministry of Communications and Information and the Infocomm Media Development Authority for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting and the kind and warm hospitality put forward to all delegates. I personally thank Your Excellency S. Iswaran, Minister of Communications and Information of Singapore, and all the officials for your support to successfully organize this meeting and the Senior Officials Meeting for the Asia-Pacific ICT Ministerial Meeting 2019, which was concluded yesterday.

Excellencies,

2019 is a very special year for the APT, both in terms of having this prestigious Ministerial Meeting and of celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the APT.

The APT was established in 1979 by a joint initiative of ESCAP and ITU. Since its inception, APT has fostered the development of telecommunication services and information infrastructure throughout the region with a particular focus on the expansion thereof in less developed areas.

Throughout the four decades, APT has worked closely with our members through various work programmes and activities to harmonize the region's national policies, to bridge technological differences and to facilitate inter regional and intra-regional cooperation. APT continues to expand and evolve each year in order to assist our members in meeting the challenges posed both by local and global ventures.

Excellencies,

The Asia-Pacific region is often called a region of huge potential, having two thirds of global population. The economic development in the region in recent years has exceeded the average of global development in spite of hard-to-eradicate challenges from diversity with geographical, demographical, and socioeconomic differences. This great success has been possible since all shared a common commitment and collective political will in deepening cooperation among our member countries towards the prosperity and well-being of our region.

Five years ago, ICT Ministers from Asia-Pacific region met in Brunei Darussalam where they adopted the Brunei Darussalam Statement on "Building Smart Digital Economy through ICT". Since then, all APT members including APT Secretariat had actively engaged in the implementation of the Brunei Darussalam Statement to achieve the priority areas and action items set by the honourable ministers for a smart digital economy amidst the other immense challenges rippling across the ICT industry. I would like to congratulate all APT members for the great attempt in transforming to digital economy in our region and harvesting the socio-economic benefits thereof. I am also grateful for all efforts and the support extended in helping APT Secretariat carry out this important mission.

This year, ICT Ministers from the Asia-Pacific region gather here in Singapore to address the new and emerging developments over the next 5 years.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations recognize ICT as a key enabler for economic growth and addressing challenges in our daily lives. ICT has ever evolved so fast and now it transforms other conventional sectors in the context of digital economy. Smart City, Smart Farming, Smart Healthcare and others whichever have prefix of "*smart*" would be simply understood that the service is transformed with ICT to better meet the needs of users and consumers.

On the contrary, these smart things or digital economy has increased the gap and disparity between developed and developing countries and urban and rural community in a country. Different development phases as well as its speed and direction have resulted in these gap and disparity. In this context, I do believe it is timely for ICT Ministers in the region to set out new guidelines to co-create a connected digital future.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Broadband connectivity in the Asia-Pacific region has been progressed substantially. Active mobile subscription in 2015 was 1.5 Billion but it becomes 2.9 Billion in 2018, which accounts for 64.3 per cent of the total population in the region. However, half of the mobile connection still works through 2G or 3G, hence making it hard for citizens to harness the benefit of broadband. Meanwhile, 5G commercial service has recently launched. This would be a snapshot describing the disparity of the development.

Therefore, the APT requires the cooperation and collaboration to provide affordable, available, and sustainable ICT and broadband connectivity to all citizens, particularly to the unserved and underserved areas in our member countries.

On top of the affordable, available, and sustainable ICT infrastructure, government policies and initiatives should be promoted to bolster ICT-centric innovation, entrepreneurship and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). When it comes to MSMEs, the global GDP contribution of MSMEs are 60 per cent as an average. However, most of the contribution of APT member countries is far below than the global average except Singapore which records 65 per cent.

Another important issue to work on is “Inclusiveness”. It is crucial to promote widespread digital adoption by providing access to ICT for all citizens, especially for vulnerable groups, so that they can participate and contribute to the digital economy and society. Therefore, development of national digital inclusion policies, strategies, practices, and activities should be encouraged and supported.

In addition, APT members should encourage trusted and secured systems which promote the protection of data privacy, facilitate data flow with trust, and are resilient towards cyber threats so that people can engage in online activities with confidence and openly share information online.

Excellencies,

Your presence here in Singapore today is precious. It provides us the excellent opportunity to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the APT, and more importantly to agree on a Ministerial Statement that will shape the future of ICT development in our region in the next 5 years.

The draft Singapore Statement of the Asia-Pacific ICT Ministers on “Co-creating a connected digital future in the Asia-Pacific” had been prepared by experts from APT Members who attended two meetings of the Correspondence Group for the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Meeting (CGMM). Such draft Statement had been considered by individual Member and had been finalized at the meeting of the Senior Officials from APT Members yesterday.

The consensus among the Members was reached with the final draft Statement intended to address new and emerging ICT challenges and issues. It is expected to shed the light on how ICT could be utilized to transform our lives and societies in order to harness the benefit of ICT and to ensure safety and security of our society. It is also expected that it would pave the way for the APT and its members in co-creating a connected digital future for the benefit of our citizens in the region. The draft Singapore Statement is now ready for your consideration in this meeting.

Pursuant to the Ministerial Statement and its Strategic Goals, the APT will work constructively with members and partners including international organizations to make your vision accomplished.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by extending my heartfelt appreciations once again to all Excellencies, Honourables, and distinguished delegates who are here in this auspicious event.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the host for the wonderful arrangements and warm hospitality extended to all of us.

Thank you very much.