

Paro Outcome Statement

On

Expert Consultation on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway and regional connectivity

We, the representatives of the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, and Thailand, representatives from the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Secretariat, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Secretariat, and LIRNEAsia, assembled in Paro, Bhutan, on 1-2 October 2014, for the Expert Consultation on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway and regional connectivity, within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (APIS) 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 as a meta-infrastructure that enhances efficiencies across all infrastructures, increases economy-wide productivity and global competitiveness of countries in Asia-Pacific,

Recalling Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 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 network 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,

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

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 the associated services and content, for the achievement of reliable, affordable and universal access to and use of information and communications technology,

Recognising that Asian landlocked countries, such as Bhutan, are faced with exceptionally high international prices for the transit of 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 the enabling environment for private investment and to increase the availability of and access to financing for information and communications technology projects in developing countries of Asia-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,

Further recognizing seamless regional connectivity in land transport offered by the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway 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-Pacific,

Resolve to prioritize promotion of market competition, and 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,

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

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

Agree to identify measures to develop international telecommunications connectivity in Asia-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 organisations, including subregional organizations such as BIMSTEC and ECO, 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 organisations in Asia and the Pacific, especially BIMSTEC and ECO to actively facilitate the regional cooperation in ICT infrastructure and promote regional connectivity as a regional public good and as well as an integral component of regional integration process in its respective regions,

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

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

Call on the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to conduct a series of in depth analytical studies and continue updating of ESCAP-ITU broadband backbone networks maps and expert consultations in order to initiate the Asia-Pacific information superhighway,

Call on the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 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.