

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Shareef
Minister of State
Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology
Maldives
Committee on Information and Communications Technology & Science,
Technology and Innovation
30 August – 1 September 2022

Opening Remarks, Opening Session

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to thank Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, for her invitation to attend this Committee session.

I am very pleased to attend the opening of the Fourth Session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation.

Distinguished delegates,

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted our socio-economic livelihood. Numerous communities and families were affected. However, we also witnessed that during the pandemic, governments, private sectors, and other stakeholders across the Asia-Pacific region had also fast-tracked the adoption of digital technologies to mitigate such negative impacts.

The Government of the Maldives is committed to laying the foundations for expedited digital development of the Maldives. In this respect, we are working on establishing both regulatory and technological foundations for digital transformation, including legislation for privacy and data protection, cyber security and digital service leadership. We are developing a national digital identity as the heart of a secure and trusted digital economy, digital society. In addition, we have prioritised development of digital government and seamless service delivery across the islands. Today we cannot discount the nature and role of the new generation of frontier technologies in sustainable development.

As one crisis after the other challenge governments across the Asia-Pacific region, we must explore the promise of frontier technologies from Artificial Intelligence, Distributed Ledger Technologies to Internet of Things, Drones and Virtual and Augmented Reality. Digital transformation is a key strategy for the Maldives in its development agenda.

There are, however, real risks and certain complexities associated with adoption of new technologies. We must ensure not only equitable development, mitigating the risk of widening digital divide. We also need to address policy and regulatory challenges posed by these cutting-edge technologies as we seek a vibrant economy where the consumers are protected, and innovation is encouraged.

In response, my Ministry is collaborating with ESCAP and UNDESA on implementing a project to enhance the institutional capacity of government officials for leveraging policy experimentation and regulatory sandboxes in creating a more conducive space where we can experiment and trail with these new digital technologies and innovations at the edge or outside of the current policy and regulatory regimes. Policy experimentation and regulatory sandboxes can be a central tool for expediting the introduction of new technologies in the Maldives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we attend this fourth session of the Committee, it will be an important opportunity for us all to discuss how economies in our region could work together to accelerate the use of digital technologies for increasing productivity and citizen's welfare.

The Maldives has continued to support regional cooperation on digital connectivity through chairing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee in past sessions. The Maldives will continue to offer its full support towards the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway action plan 2022-2026. I invite other ESCAP member States to work together through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway platform on identifying regional solutions to national digital challenges.

Thank you.