

**Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation, Fourth Session**

**Agenda Item 3: Action plan for implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, 2022–2026 (30 August 2022, 14:00 – 15:00)**

**Country Statement: Tonga**

Mr Chair,

Allow me to extend our sincere thanks to the ESCAP secretariat for convening the Fourth Session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology, and Innovation.

This important session is timely and important to stock-take on the progress of regional cooperation on digital connectivity for Asia and the Pacific.

Mr Chair, Tonga puts important emphasis on improving resilient digital infrastructure connectivity. The recent volcanic eruption in Tonga that disconnected the only submarine cable for broadband Internet to the country has highlighted the importance of redundancy of digital connectivity. In response, the Government of Tonga together with other key stakeholders are discussing of the connection of a second submarine cable. In addition, satellite communications has been strengthened especially for the outer islands to act as back-ups should the submarine cables be disrupted again. My delegation is therefore pleased to see that the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Action Plan 2022-2026 includes focusses on SMART cables and resilient digital infrastructure connectivity. Tonga therefore requests the ESCAP secretariat to continue supporting resilient digital connectivity for Tonga and other Pacific island countries.

Digital Transformation is also of great importance for Tonga. A recent internal restructuring in my Ministry has resulted in the creation of a new 'Digital Transformation Department.' This Department reports directly to the Prime Minister of Tonga who has keen interest on promoting digital transformation for the sustainable development of Tonga. The Digital Transformation Department is currently looking into developing a national policy on Digital transformation that will assist to coordinate all different stakeholders working in this space. My delegation is pleased to see that digital transformation is an area of potential cooperation under the new AP-IS action plan. As such, my delegation requests the support of the ESCAP secretariat and regional partners on promoting digital transformation for sustainable development in Tonga and other Pacific island countries.

Tonga has continued to engage and support the implementation of the AP-IS platform. Tonga therefore offers its continued full support to the new AP-IS action plan. I therefore invite ESCAP member countries to work together on accelerating digital transformation for sustainable development through this new AP-IS action plan.

Thank you Chair.