Summary of Opening Remarks

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Asia-Pacific Regional Community Networks Summit 2021 - Innovating policymaking to connect the unconnected (Virtual Meeting), 18 August 2021 (10:00-13:00 Bangkok Time)

- We are pleased to continue our collaboration with ESCAP and reconvene for the 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Community Networks Summit after the success of the first event in 2019.

- The last couple of years have been challenging for the world at large with the global pandemic, and the Internet has played a critical role in helping people through these difficult times.

- There is no doubt about the utility and resilience of the Internet in the face of COVID-19. It has served us well in all aspects during these times - from education to remote working to entertainment in lockdown, keeping in touch with friends and family in isolation and so much more.

- That utility and resilience is no accident or coincidence; it’s the openness and interoperability of the technologies, and the way in which it has evolved using the Internet multi stakeholder model that has allowed us to benefit from the Internet, and all the applications and services that run on it.

- At the same time, the pandemic has also demonstrated the gaps that exist with access, including the new and emerging digital divides. These recent times have also highlighted how critical digital technologies are for society today.

- We all probably saw the images on television and on social media of what happened in some parts of our region when lockdowns and movement restrictions were put in place. Many people didn’t know what to do and where to turn too. Things were also exacerbated by the fact that affordability and access to devices were important during these times, and many had no means of access, or couldn’t afford it.

- Over the last couple of decades, we have had a whole lot of innovation in technology and creativity that has provided us with the Internet and applications and services that run on it. It is also now time for regulatory and policymaking efforts to be as innovative.

- Policymaking and regulatory reform can no longer be reactive. We cannot keep hanging on to processes and norms from 30 or 40 years ago. In some cases, the processes have not changed at all since then.

- There is a need to be proactive in how we approach policymaking, and as well, the actions we take.
- We also must be mindful of the fact that no one technology or form of access will address all the issues. We need to have a collaborative effort to bring people online, using whatever means and access types that are available.

- Complementary access solutions such as community networks are one such method, and we need to further incentivise such initiatives. The event today will help us reflect a bit on what we discussed in 2019 and how things have progressed. The events of the last couple of years have served to heighten the need for connectivity, and we can together explore how we can move forward.

- A couple of years ago, at another ESCAP event, I suggested that we needed “the 3 C’s” to make things work: Collaboration between players and actors, Coordination between them, and Cooperation to reach our objective of connectivity for everyone.

- Today I’d like to suggest a 4th “C” – Common understanding – so that we all know what it is we need to do together.

- I look forward to your contribution to the discussions today, and to us all working together to help connect the unconnected.