



**Asian Forum on
Information and Communication
Technology
Policies and e-Strategies**
(www.apdip.net/asian-forum/)



Welcome Remarks

by



Richard Leete
Resident Representative, UNDP Malaysia

20-22 October 2003
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



The Asian Forum on ICT Policies and e-Strategies is organized by UNDP's Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme under the auspices of the United Nations ICT Task Force, with support from the Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia, Malaysia, and the Government of Japan.

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Yang Berhormat Datuk Amar Leo Moggie,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Country Delegates and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning to you all and a warm welcome to Malaysia. I am especially pleased to share the podium with Yang Berhormat Datuk Amar Leo Moggie, Minister of Energy, Communications and Multimedia of Malaysia whose vision in Information and Communications Technology has been a powerful driver in the country's remarkable development.

On behalf of UNDP, I welcome you to this Forum on ICT Policies and E-Strategies which is being organized by UNDP's Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme under the auspices of the United Nations ICT Task Force, with the generous support from the Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia, Malaysia, and the Government of Japan. I would also like to thank Shahid Akhtar and his team for their planning and good organisation of the Forum.

The international development community is focused on halving the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty. Most of these poor people, in fact some 75 per cent, live in rural areas. Rural poverty is compounded by isolation from markets and centers of basic social service and information provision, as well as by a lack of policy attention to rural development.

And the gaps between female and male access to assets, health, education, knowledge, and influence within decision-making processes are serious obstacles to poverty reduction, and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

ICT is transforming the global economy by providing a new engine for development, as well as changing its fundamental dynamics. But diffusion remains highly uneven across and within nations, and market forces alone will not mend this process. The extreme unevenness

in access to, and the pace and spread of, these technologies is, in large part, a reflection of deeper social and economic inequalities between and within countries.

Governments, in partnership with the private sector and civil society, must help to bridge the digital divide. ICT can serve as a critical enabler for poverty reduction and for the achievement of the MDGs. ICT has the potential to create earnings opportunities and jobs, improve the delivery of and access to basic services in health and education, facilitate information sharing and knowledge creation, and increase the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of government, business and civil society.

The United Nations system in general, and UNDP in particular, has an abundance of development knowledge and information in its publications, in its databases, on its websites, and in its human capital. With its comparative advantages in these areas, it can use ICT to support national policies and programmes, to deliver to decision-makers on demand, sound advice, comparative experiences, past lessons learned, and world-class knowledgeable expertise. It can play a role in the generation and dissemination of new ideas for the benefit of all, and especially the poor.

We may all agree that ICT has the potential to impact markedly on national development. But whether or not this potential is realised depends, *inter alia*, on the commitment of a nation's government, its champions and the people. No nation is excluded from the ICT revolution. And no nation can afford to be left behind. Where there is strong national commitment and leadership, as in the case of Malaysia's vision for the use of ICT, sound and comprehensive ICT policies and strategies tend to follow.

In developing national ICT policies, we have to consider, the ultimate target groups and beneficiaries. And we need in particular to pay greater attention to the growing disparities between urban and rural areas, between the rich and the poor, and between males and females - the digital divide within our own borders.

There is no single universal template for national ICT policy formulation and strategies. UNDP hopes that this Forum will identify some best practices, and provide the opportunity for sharing of experiences in ICT policies and strategies. Each nation differs in its level of development. However, there are common issues within the Asian context that we hope participants at this Forum will be able to discuss from national perspectives. Issues include appropriate application of ICT for empowering the poor and in better sharing the benefits of globalization processes; human resource development; access to and transferring new technologies, and public-private partnerships.

By making ICT an integral part of development assistance and solutions, developed countries and their partners can work to address economic, social and digital divides in more innovative and effective ways, and consistent with the global partnership for development foreseen in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

On behalf of UNDP-APDIP, and the entire UN family here in Malaysia, I would like to wish you well in your endeavour to formulate a Declaration on ICT Policies and E-Strategies. I will follow progress of your discussions and look forward to reading the Declaration.

Thank you.