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CAMBODIA

Cambodia is very honored to have the opportunity to take part in the WSIS which is participated by very many high officials from countries on the globe.

It has been 10 years since the UN has helped Cambodia to attain peace after many wars, in the previous 2 decades. We have also just had the third general election which has been endorsed by the international community as acceptably free and fair. However, a new government which shall be a coalition of 2 or all 3 parties is yet to be formed.

As everyone knows, after a long war period with so much destruction, the country has many high priorities in its agenda. The problems include the lack of fund, lack of know-how, many mines in the field, many handicapped people, lack of commercial institutions, high unemployment, and lack of basic infrastructures let alone the advanced infrastructures. Over the 10 years the country's achievements in some aspects enabled us to be proud but it is the contrary in a number of other aspects. Telecommunication and IT is a sector, I dare say, that we are not too proud of its development. It could have been better had we implemented the right approach from the start. That approach would include the separation of the operating entity from the regulating entity, implementation of fair rules for all operators, liberalization of the market at the pace that can be absorbed by the country and implementation of light-handed approach on regulations.

At present, Cambodia's telecommunication is characterized by very small fixed networks and relatively large mobile networks. There are about 35,000 fixed subscribers being provided by three operators, the government operator is the major one, and about 350,000 mobiles being provided by 4 private operators. In IT there are 4 operating internet service providers and two more are licensed to operate but have not yet started. In total there are about 10,000 internet subscribers of which about 100 are of broadband type. The technologies used are the normal dial-up, DSL, wireless broadband and satellite terminals.

For the PSTN and IT networks we are grateful to a number of friendly countries, namely Japan, France, Germany and Korea for providing us grant aids from which we have a number of modern telecom switches, copper networks in the capital Phnom Penh, a long distance fiber optic network from East to West across the country and an E-Government network.

In addition to the grant aid for the physical networks Cambodia has also obtained technical assistance from the ITU, KfW (of Germany), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for a number of studies and advice. As a result we have now produced a final draft telecom law. The law complies with the basic requirements of the WTO of which Cambodia has just become a member.

(Despite the slow growth in telecommunications and IT as previously mentioned one can see the improvement in the business and social environments in Cambodia. We are sure that telecommunications and IT played a role in this improvement. In 1995 a person had to travel 120 km from a central province in Cambodia to meet his business associate in the capital Phnom Penh which would take 3 hours and some substantial cost. Now he can just call which would cost him a fraction of the previous amount and save at least one day of time. A company executive working on a project of rubber plantation of 5,000 hectare land had to raise capital from abroad and obtain a government approval for the project used internet for their daily communication before signing the deal. The internet saved him at least 2 months of time and substantial costs of travelling had there not internet services available. The above two examples show how telecommunications and IT make life easier and less costly).

The challenge we are facing now is how to make the telecom and IT services available to the remote and rural places. We are likely to see the use of a mixture of technologies, namely fiber optic, microwave and satellite. In this respect we are currently trying to promote a USO scheme where telecom operators will be requested to bid for the lowest subsidy in extending telecommunication service to pre-defined less profitable areas. The source of the subsidy fund for the USO is yet to be identified. Knowing that the funds available from the licensing fees of the existing telecom operators are being used for other sectors like health, education etc and etc the funds for the telecom USO scheme will have to be found from other sources. We are hopeful that grant aids and assistance from friendly and wealthier countries will be forthcoming especially when we have a transparent and reliable USO scheme put in place. We have to be working hard on that.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the economic and social situations in Cambodia have improved relatively significantly due partly to the availability of telecom and IT infrastructures and services. Telecom and IT surely play a significant role in the growth and sustainability of the economic and social wellbeing of the country. The improvement of the telecom and IT sector in Cambodia could have been quite a lot better had we implemented the right approach from the early stage. Now continuing effort is being put on the improvement of the regulatory structure of the sector. A USO scheme is being devised and hopefully the services will be available in most, if not all, parts of the country. With the transparent and reliable USO scheme we are hopeful that more assistance will be accorded by the friendly and wealthier countries.

Thank you for your attention.

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