

DAY 1 -- December 3, 2001 (Monday) Morning

Speech by Mr. Anthony SK Wong

Mr. Utsumi, Mr. Toure, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honored to have your trust in appointing me as the chairperson of this very important Symposium attended by so many esteemed Regulators around the world.

We live in a world of extremely rapid changes in telecommunications technologies. Not so long ago the telephone network was regarded as a natural monopoly. The telecommunications regulators in those days, if any were in existence, were mainly dealing with the question of how to regulate the rate of return of the monopoly telephone operator. Within the last decade or so we have seen what tantamount to miraculous inventions of new equipment and new services – the optical fiber, the cellular phone, the digital and compression techniques, the internet, just to name a few. These have led to the emergence of whole new opportunities and markets in the telecommunications sector, resulting in competitive provisions of a large variety of facilities and services. Regulators are faced with a whole new ball game in their courts. They have to look at issues like the economic, technical and accounting aspects of interconnection. They have to work out rules of fair competition. They have to make sure limited resources like the radio spectrum and the numbering plan are allocated in the most efficient manner among the many operators.

The work of the regulators is not made any easier by the recent ups and downs in the economic climate. The over-supply of investment and capacity caused by the dot-com fever and the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, the dot-com bubble burst and the recent 911 incident all pose significant challenges to the telecom regulator.

On a global basis we also see significant differences in the state of technology deployment and in the level of market development among different countries. While telecommunications services have become a basic necessity for every citizen in the industrialized countries they remain a scarcity in many parts of the developing world, leading to a more and more polarized digital divide. With the assistance of organizations like the ITU, it is comforting to see that many developing countries are putting much greater efforts in their telecommunications developments. This is evidence also by the fact that we are seeing a rapid growth of the number of telecom regulators – from what was a handful a decade ago to the current count of over a hundred and growing day by day.

The GSR is an important initiative for the building of a bridge and a platform for regulators to

share their experience and exchange views and findings in the vastly complex field of telecommunications regulation. Not only is it useful for the newly created regulatory agencies to gain useful information from others successes or mistakes, it is also valuable for all regulators, old or young, to come together to look at issues of common concerns and identify common solutions to tackle those issues. As the telecommunications services are fast becoming globalize this platform for shared information and concerted action becomes all the more important and necessary.

I am pleased to see the overwhelming support for this Symposium. We have three days for us to have a meaningful dialogue among ourselves. Although I do not expect everyone will go home with their problems solved, with you co-operation and contribution I hope we could at least make a good start in the building of this meaningful bridge among us and take home an action plan for immediate implementation.

Thank you.