

STATEMENT AT THE 16TH ITU PLENIPOTENTIARY CONFERENCE 2002, MARRAKECH, MORROCO BY DASHO LEKI DORJI, HONORABLE DEPUTY MINISTER, MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS, ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN.

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Secretary General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates.

On behalf of the Kingdom of Bhutan, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary General and the ITU secretariat and to the Kingdom of Morocco for organizing the first ITU PP of the new Millennium. I would like to congratulate the Royal government of Morocco for the excellent preparation made for this important gathering here at the beautiful city of Marrakech.

Bhutan has been the member of the International Telecommunications Union for 14 years and we had the pleasure of attending three plenipotentiary conferences. Since the first PP that we attended in Kyoto in 1994, our telecom sector has undergone dramatic reformation. We have been able to introduce many changes of historic significance. We have connected all districts and several sub-districts with telecom facilities, thus overcoming the formidable challenges posed by our mountainous terrain. Since PP94 we extended telephone lines from 3000 lines to a national network with 20,000 lines, covering most part of the country. When PP98 was held in Minneapolis, we were not connected to the Internet. Now I am proud to say that we have access from all major regions. We are also exploring all avenues to promote the use of ICT in our daily lives. We have even implemented a pilot project to provide services using IP based technology to find the most cost effective solution for rural areas.

We are now embarking on a very ambitious project to reach the un-reached. We want to provide services for everyone, everywhere in the country, including remote regions where it previously took months to reach. We will strive to achieve this difficult objective.

The question that now arises is whether just being able to provide services to remote areas will be able to bridge the digital divide? We believe that bridging the digital divide will require much more effort and resources than providing telecom services. We are here talking about access tools, which include but not limited to, Pcs and modems. Then there is content, the implication of languages, literacy, computer literacy in particular, all essential requirement to bridge the digital divide.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentleman,

The promotion of ICT is complex in a developing society, which is grappling with literacy rate, which is not 100 percent. We realize that it is not a realistic objective to expect that all citizens will benefit from ICT. According to this we would like to concentrate on schools and Institutions of higher learning to promote the use of ICT. In this regard I would like to commend the ITU Youth forum initiatives. The young Men and Women whom the ITU is sponsoring to Telecom Asia 2002 in Hong Kong, I am sure, will be excellent ambassadors for the promotion of ICT.

The rapidly changing technology and the need for human resources to keep up with the technological change is a very serious concern for my country as it is for many other countries. An adequate skilled human resource is key to the development of ICT and most developing countries are severely handicapped by the shortage of trained manpower.

I feel that this is one area where we must look to ITU for further initiatives and support.

I would also like to touch upon a very important issue that concerns all of us; the need for global co-operation to battle Cyber crime. Since communication networks have no geographic boundaries, National laws framed for individual countries are not adequate. We desperately need cyber laws that also cut across the national boundaries to tackle such problems. I believe that individuals, governments, societies all need the protection from cyber crimes.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentleman,

I also convey the appreciation of our Government and the people to the ITU for identifying Bhutan as one e-post pilot project countries. I have no doubt that such special initiatives will continue to make major changes to our lives.

I would also like to place on record my deep appreciation to the ITU for its invaluable assistance to all developing countries in the areas of the new media and also for the special attention given to LDCs for the past few years. We would like to acknowledge the very important initiatives taken by the APT in the development of ICT in our region. It is our hope that ITU and other organizations will continue helping in the global endeavor to bridge the digital divide to the most needy.

Mr. Chairman, I am confident that, with your enlightened guidance, this will be a successful conference. I wish all the distinguished delegates every success in their deliberations.

Tashi Delek