

Republic of Korea

General Statement

Minister

Dr. Sang-chul LEE

Honorable Chairman of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, heads of delegations and delegates from all around the world,

On behalf of the government of the Republic of Korea, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Moroccan government and the organizers for hosting the ITU Conference.

In addition, I would like to thank the Director General, Mr. Yoshio Utzumi and his staff for their dedication to the preparation of this conference.

Also, I extend my gratitude to the citizens of Marrakech for their warm hospitality.

Today, I would like to briefly present you with Korea's digitalization experience along with our achievements. I hope some of the lessons learned by Korea would be useful to other countries, who are taking similar paths.

We found that the key success factor in building a successful information society is the leadership with firm belief in digitalization, with clear vision and effective strategies.

Korea pursued " digitalization " as a basic national policy objective. Thus Korea enacted the "Informatization Promotion Act" in 1995 and devised several Grand Master Plans for national digitalization. Through this, we could lay out a comprehensive system for building an information society.

In order to make up for late industrialization, Korea began to modernize and upgrade the communication infrastructure from early 1980's. We have linked over ten thousand schools to the broadband Internet and, all government administrative units, down to small townships. This enabled Korea to become one of the first few nations in the world to have an advanced nationwide broadband infrastructure.

To boost demand, the government offered computer training to 10 million Koreans who were left out of digitalization, such as housewives, the elderly, the low-income and prison inmates.

With the entry to the WTO, competition was introduced to the telecom market and the fierce competition among the telecom companies enhanced the quality of the service. This in turn increased the number of subscribers immensely.

The service providers were able to generate a large profit which was invested to the build-up of strong infrastructure and technological development. This created a good cycle for the growth of the information and communication sector.

Currently, the number of mobile subscribers has grown to 31 million which is 64% penetration rate and the Internet users exceeds 25 million, accounting for 58% of the total population.

In particular, over 9.6 million households are subscribing to the broadband Internet which is the highest penetration rate in the world.

Due to such progress, the IT sector export has recorded 30% of the total export in 2001 and this accounted for 60% of the total trade surplus of the last 4 years.

In short, the IT sector has emerged as the core industry of our economy. Also it greatly contributed to expediting the economic recovery from the 1997 financial crisis of the country.

Through all this process, we have clearly learned that digitalization is no longer a matter of choice but a must to who live in the knowledge based information economy.

Those who are unable to adapt to the IT revolution fast enough will see that the information gap could be just as harsh and severe as that of the industrial society.

Therefore, it is very fortunate that the ITU is preparing the WSIS as a part of its effort to narrow the digital divide among nations.

Korea, as a responsible member of the international community, and as a member of the ITU council, has done everything to play the role demanded upon us.

Korea has dispatched IT experts to the ITU secretariat as well as to the WSIS secretariat. Furthermore, recently, Korea has successfully hosted ITU's "Information Security Workshop" and the "Workshop on Women's Informatization".

In addition, every year, we are sending "Internet Youth Volunteers" to developing nations all over the world in order to help those nations gain higher capacity for information usage.

Also later this year, we will establish the "Information Training Center for the Developing Nations" together with the Development Gateway Foundation of the World Bank.

In the future, we will continue to help increase the benefit of IT by providing policy and technology consulting to the developing nations. Also we will hold various forums and symposiums to share our experience and technology.

Since digitalization takes less time than industrialization and its growth potential is much larger, it should be considered as the quickest road to reach the global co-prosperity.

However, this road will lead us to our intended destination only when we ourselves make the effort to get there. We should believe in digitalization and share our experience within the frame of a strongly cooperative relationship.

There is an old Korean saying in Korea that "Bad things shared will halve the pain while good things shared will double the joy". As such, Korea offers to share our golden fruit with the world.

In closing, I would like to add that Korea seeks to continue to play a vital role in the ITU. By doing so, we want to help the global development of the information and communication technology as well as the elimination of the digital gap.

I would like to once again, thank the Moroccan government, the organizers and the ITU staff for their commitment and effort toward the success of this conference.

Thank you.