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Opening Statement

**Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science,
Technology and Innovation**

30 August 2022

Excellency Mr. Chaiwut Thanakmanusorn, Minister of Digital Economy and Society of Thailand,

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

A warm welcome to the fourth session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation.

We are living through a decisive moment. The mass adoption of digital technologies was given a huge boost by the largely unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, digital technology has rapidly taken over more and more aspects of our lives.

At the same time, the pandemic has widened and deepened the digital divide both between and within countries. This has reinforced a vicious cycle of economic inequalities. Digital divide has been referred to as the new face of inequality.

Lack of basic digital infrastructure, adequate investments and affordability have been **key limiting factors** for many countries in the region.

Nevertheless, almost without exception, government and business services have prioritized the development of new digital paradigms and are enacting reforms for policy and regulatory frameworks that are more flexible, adaptive and collaborative.

At the heart of such new paradigms is the **digital transformation** process, which is not simply about access to digital connections and applications.

Rather, it is a transformational process in which people are not just consumers but also creators of previously unheard-of products and services, thus accelerating the transformation of value systems and socioeconomic structures.

That is why digital inclusion must be at the heart of digital transformation and accompanying digital policies and regulations if the promise to “leave no one behind” is to be met.

In addition, as the fourth industrial revolution – or 4IR -- evolves, we have the opportunity to explore the new frontiers of technology and innovation. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region are fast embracing 4IR technologies.

While many developed and some developing countries are harnessing the benefits of 4IR technologies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is a risk that least developed countries and other countries in special situations could be left behind.

The intra-regional disparity in terms of development and usage of 4IR technologies is a challenge for the region. Countries could mainstream the usage of 4IR technologies through enabling policy frameworks and strategies to accelerate their development process.

Against this background, the Committee this year has an important role in further shaping cooperation and partnerships through regional cooperation platforms.

Towards this end, we have supported member States in the development of an action plan for 2022 to 2026 for a more practical and streamlined implementation of the Asia Pacific Information Superhighway.

I look forward to the Committee’s further guidance and endorsement of this proposal so that the secretariat can move forward with its expedited implementation.

In this regard, I am also pleased to inform the Committee’s distinguished representatives that the Ministry of Science and ICT of the Republic of Korea, in cooperation with the ESCAP Secretariat, is organizing the first Asia Pacific Digital Ministerial Conference 2022 under the theme “Shaping Our Common Future” from 9 to 10 November in Seoul.

I express my appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for organizing this event which, with the valuable support of ministers from the region, will impart political momentum to our common endeavor to leave no one behind.

I am also pleased to inform you that under the Asia-Pacific Plan of Action on Space Technology Applications for Sustainable Development (2018-2030), and drawing from the Global Integrated Geospatial Information Framework, our members and associate members have made much progress in the preparation of the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development, to be held on 26 October of this year in Jakarta.

I express my appreciation to the Government of Indonesia for hosting and co-organizing this event with the secretariat. Together we can put the ever-expanding range of geospatial applications and data in the service of more effective disaster risk mitigation and acceleration of SDG implementation.

I look forward to hearing your deliberations and receiving your further guidance.

I wish you a very successful Committee session.

Thank you.