



**High Level Policy Statement by Sri Lanka
WSIS Forum
2 - 6 May 2016, Geneva, Switzerland**

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset let me express our sincere gratitude to the Secretary General of ITU, Mr. Houlin Zhao and other officials of ITU, as well as UNESCO, UNCTAD, UNDP and the WSIS Action Line Facilitators/Co-Facilitators for organizing this timely event, in line with the Mandate given by UNGA Resolution 70/125. The WSIS Forum which resulted from the collective action of all States and many UN entities is considered the world's largest annual gathering of the 'ICT for development' community.

The great potential of information and communications technology (ICT) as a tool to accelerate progress for humanity and protection of our planet was recognized once more, when the World Leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development last year. ICT is a crucial enabler in bridging the digital divide and to build inclusive societies. Identifying emerging trends in ICT, incorporating technological innovations for advancing growth and development in the national and international policies have become more important than ever. Hence, focusing on how this Forum could support the implementation of the SDGs could undoubtedly help in strengthening the 'development pillar' of the United Nations system, for which the ITU along with other partner agencies have made substantive and continuous contributions over the past years.

Mr. Chairman,

There is a unique synergy between the growth of a country's economy and the development of its ICT sector as it drives productivity and innovation. It increases the quality of learning as well as the effectiveness in the provision of public services such as health, transportation, financing, security etc. ICT literacy and connectivity empowers a nation and her peoples by providing competitive advantage in a globalized world. Therefore, the basic foundation for an information society is the availability of ubiquitous information and communication infrastructure.

Sri Lanka has made considered efforts in the implementation of the specific WSIS outcomes to achieve these objectives in an affordable and cost-effective manner. The Government's vision is to build Sri Lanka to be a competitive global ICT centre through fostering innovation and inclusive digital empowerment, and has launched a medium term strategy for a Digital Sri Lanka (2017-2020) based on five priority areas.

Developing Information infrastructure to infuse ICT into production as well as services sectors at all levels has been promoted vigorously to boost economic growth. As stated by the Hon. Prime Minister in his Economic Policy Statement last year, ICT development in the country is envisaged to create a conducive environment to enter into the global value chain system. Further, it is expected to encourage small and large scale farmers and entrepreneurs to participate in the global economy and also to make Sri Lanka an attractive and competitive destination for international investment, taking advantage of its strategic location and other natural potentials.

Sri Lanka has several advantages such as high literacy, highly capable ICT human resources with best of breed software architectures and designers. As per a survey carried out in 2015 by the Department of Census and Statistic of Sri Lanka even among the individuals engage in elementary occupations, above 22% are computer literate as of the first half of 2015. Further, **developing the human resources** by improving access to ICT literacy has been another key priority.

Access to Broadband Internet, especially through free Wi-Fi through all licensed operators, by setting up of hotspots in public places across the country, and introducing innovative technologies such as Google Loon mark a significant step towards **enhancing digital inclusion**. As of date, the telecommunication sector consists of approximately 2.6 Mn fixed access subscribers, 24.4 million mobile subscribers, 4Mn broadband subscribers and 5800 public payphones spread across the country. These figures are of high achievements considering the total population of 21 million.

Wide availability of mobile broadband services coupled with the establishment of 1,000 telecenters ("Nenasala") in all provinces, has increased internet penetration providing equal access to information and e-services by all segments of the society. The recent introduction of low cost smart devices will further increase the affordability of mobile broadband services.

Sri Lanka's mobile operators have deployed cutting edge technologies for the provision of mobile broadband. Sri Lanka is a regional pioneer in launching 3G technology and the first to deploy 4G-LTE network. Both 3G and 4G technologies cover in excess of 75% of the population which is expected to grow further with healthy competition.

Mr. Chairman,

The “*e-Sri Lanka* Development initiative”, the flagship e-Development program supported by World Bank and other development partners, has made Sri Lanka one of the most connected governments in the region, providing its people a higher quality of life with access to better public services, learning opportunities and information. With this initiative, the **e-Government** concept of Re-engineering Government has shown a great success in my country. As a result, Sri Lanka has been ranked 65th among 143 economies in the Network Readiness Index (NRI) of the Global Information Technology Report (GITR, 2015) of the World Economic Forum. Sri Lanka’s UN e-Government Index ranking has improved significantly, moving 41 places in 2014.

The Government of Sri Lanka recently initiated a country-wide project to provide every citizen with a Unique Digital Identity (UDI), which facilitates their secure engagement in online transactions. Further, this project will be supplemented with a Household Fund Transfer Management system for the Ministry of Finance to efficiently and effectively manage government’s disbursements under Social SafetyNet programmes for citizens.

The smart use of digital technologies among Sri Lankan enterprises had created new business opportunities, more jobs and has helped accelerate the transformation of the Sri Lankan business landscape. The public-private sector partnership strategy of the Government has opened new vistas and unique opportunities. Business chambers and the industry have set ambitious targets to advance ICT as the number one contributor of the economy. Currently the ICT/BPO sector claims export revenue of Rs 1 Bn per year. The target of the government is to double this revenue by developing regional infrastructure facilities and promote the creation of 1,000 start-ups in three years. In order to create greater legal certainty and confidence for e-Commerce and e-Business providers and users, Sri Lanka ratified the UN Electronic Communications Convention on 7th July 2015, becoming the first country to do so in South Asia. The enabling legislation to implement this treaty is already in place making Sri Lanka an e-Commerce legal hub in South Asia.

While promoting e-government and providing all opportunities to promote and protect freedom of expression on line, the Government has also paid close attention to ensure **safe and secure cyber environment** for all its users. The regulatory role of the government in the areas of spectrum allocation, promoting healthy business competitiveness and providing secure digital platforms for online and offline interaction are important aspects in this regard. By becoming a State party to the Budapest Cyber Crime Convention from 1st September 2015, Sri Lanka has already demonstrated its strong commitment towards harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques, and increasing law enforcement and judicial

cooperation among nations in combating cybercrimes. Sri Lanka is the first South Asian State to become a party to the Budapest Convention, ensuring that Sri Lanka is safer for international investments and trade using digital infrastructure.

Sri Lanka supports the multi-stakeholder framework for Internet Governance. As our experience in implementing successful ICT4D strategies have demonstrated, it is essential to ensure that stakeholders works towards achieving a safer and secure Internet accessible to all communities. Sri Lanka has worked closely with ICANN, ITU and we have also established a vibrant Internet Society (ISOC-LK).

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, I would like to say that Sri Lanka is geared towards harnessing the potential of ICT in its development, in particular in realizing the 2030 Development Agenda and the SDGs. We therefore look forward to engage with interest in the WSIS 2016 discussions in the next few days with the hope that this forum will enable all of us, Member States, and other stakeholders to share knowledge and best practices in order to ensure open, safe and empowering digital space for the common good.

Thank You.