ITU statement

Good afternoon,

My name is Atsuko Okuda, Regional Director of the ITU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, based in Bangkok. I would like to thank ESCAP to invite ITU to this important event.

ITU is the UN agency specialized for information and communication technology with the mandate of connecting the unconnected by 2030. Our development work covers a wide range with focus on digital inclusion of vulnerable groups in society, including youth, women, people with disabilities and older people.

In our aging societies in Asia and the Pacific, how to support older people with digital connectivity and digital technology has been a topic of emerging importance, especially under COVID restrictions. According to ITU’s Facts and Figures 2021, 4.9 billion people were reported to be online with an unparalleled increase of approximately 800 million Internet users between 2019 and 2021, due partly to the COVID impact. However, there are still 2.9 billion people unconnected, and 96% of them are living in developing countries.

For most economies, the internet use gap between 75+ years and 15-74 are wide, at more than 50 percentage points in over half of economies where we have data. In Norway, for instance, it is 7 percentage point difference, while in Kazakhstan, it is 80 percentage points.

In addition to the numbers, there are also safety issues among older Internet users. Without digital literacy, some of the older Internet users unfortunately became victims of online frauds and cyberattacks. At the same time, digital connectivity and technology provide them with unparalleled opportunities to access medial and health care and government services, enjoy online services such as e-commerce and being connected to encourage their active social and economic participation in society.

In order to support government policies and initiatives, ITU has been working with other UN agencies, such as WHO, to promote the use of digital technology. For example, in Thailand, ITU is in the process of developing mAging programme which focuses on a holistic wellbeing of older people in the country with mobile technology.

ITU is delighted to continue working with UN agencies, such as ESCAP, and member countries to promote the use of digital technology for older people, so as to leave no one offline.