Indian Intervention on agenda item 3 - Bridging the digital divide for inclusive broadband access
3rd session of the Committee on ICT & STI
(19-20 Aug, 2020, Bangkok)

Mister/Madam Chair
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

The world is experiencing a tectonic shift, as digital technologies are radically transforming the governance, businesses and markets globally. As the world adapts to this new digital era, the role of the governments will be pivotal; both in ensuring that the benefits of digital technologies and connectivity are harnessed by all and also its varied challenges are effectively addressed.

2. I am happy to share that India is transforming rapidly into a digitally empowered society, in line with the vision of the Prime Minister of India. India believes that Digitalization by responsible use of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Cloud computing, Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data and others, in conjunction with digital connectivity, is an important aspect of socio-economic development and growth. Digital Economy has emerged as the key driver for global economic growth with integration of Data-driven technologies into every sphere of human activity. Digital technologies, alongwith connectivity, have the power to transform governance, making it more transparent, accountable, accessible and participative.

3. India is well set to become a USD 1 Trillion Digital Economy by 2025, based on social inclusion and cost effective delivery of services. To this end, the Digital India programme is enabling technological empowerment that in turn is bridging the digital divide. Various initiatives such as Cloud First, Government e-Marketplace (GeM), Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), BharatNet, Common Service Centres (CSCs), Digital India, Make In India, Startup India have been helping in building a robust digital infrastructure.

4. India’s National Digital Communication Policy (NDCP), formulated in 2018, presents the policy framework to build Robust Digital Communications Infrastructure, enable Next Generation Technologies and Services through Investments, Innovation and IPR generation, and to ensure Sovereignty, Safety and Security of Digital Communications.
5. The Indian Government has embarked upon one of the world’s largest rural optical fibre roll-outs, aiming to connect 600,000 of its villages to broadband through its flagship initiative called ‘BharatNet’. Around 454,000 Kms of optical fibre cable has already been laid down covering over 154,000 Village Councils or the grass-roots local government bodies.

5. To provide a holistic development of broadband infrastructure in India, the National Broadband Mission was launched in December, 2019 to design and implement the strategy to be adopted by all stakeholders to achieve the goal of ‘Broadband for All’ towards bridging the Digital Divide. The objective being access to broadband to all the villages by 2022 with availability of high broadband speeds upto 50 Mbps.

6. The Government has also adopted the National Knowledge Network project to interconnect all institutions of higher learning and research with a high speed data communication network to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaborative research. National Knowledge Network will facilitate advanced distance education in specialized fields like engineering, science, medicine etc. as well as enable an ultra-high speed e-Governance backbone.

7. For a digitally inclusive society, more than 300,000 Common Service Centres (CSCs) have been set up as Digital kiosks in over 210,000 Gram Panchayats or Village Councils which have created entrepreneurial opportunities for one million village-level entrepreneurs, including 54,000 women entrepreneurs to provide more than 300 different services to citizens in rural areas.

8. The Government has been providing a Digital Identity called "AADHAAR", to all residents of India that is robust enough to eliminate duplicate and fake identities, and can be verified and authenticated in an easy, cost-effective way. It is the world’s largest biometric database having over 1.24 billion citizens and covering 99% of the adult population.

9. Digital India has also laid a robust foundation for India to embark on Digital Transformation. Programmes like AADHAAR, JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan Accounts, AADHAAR and Mobile), BHIM, e-
Sign, Digital Locker, Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS) are now able to connect and empower our society in a way never seen before.

10. A unified mobile platform, Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG) capable of delivering major Government services has been launched to provide a unified approach for all Indian citizens to access pan India e-Government services. Currently, over 1000 Government services of 140 Departments are being provided to the citizens through the UMANG platform.

11. One of the building blocks of the payments ecosystem in India, Unified Payments Interface (UPI) powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application, merging several banking features & merchant payments into one hood. Based on UPI, India has built Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) application which allows users to directly perform payment transfers to other users or merchants with an easy to use interface. The transactions on BHIM/UPI have grown exponentially as it has been downloaded over 50 million times since its launch in December 2016.

12. To accelerate delivery of e-Services provided by the government and to optimise ICT spending of the government, MeghRaj, a Cloud initiative has been taken by the Government. It marks a paradigm shift in the way Government procures the infrastructure and deploys the e-Governance applications. Presently, more than 1200 applications are running on over 19,500 virtual servers.

13. Targetting the idea of paperless governance, DigiLocker, a document exchange platform, eliminates the use of physical documents. DigiLocker is a secure cloud based platform for storage, sharing and verification of documents & certificates. Indian citizens who sign up for a DigiLocker account, get a dedicated cloud storage space that is linked to their AADHAAR number. Organizations that are registered with Digital Locker can push electronic copies of documents and certificates like driving license, Voter ID and school certificates directly into citizens’ lockers.

14. We have deployed “MyGov”, a platform for citizens engagement towards Good governance in India, which is a unique first of its kind participatory governance initiative involving the common citizen at large, brings the government closer to the common man by healthy exchange
of ideas and views with the ultimate goal to contribute to the social and economic
transformation of India. In a short span of time, MyGov has got over 12 Mn registered users.

15. A Government e-Marketplace (GeM) has been deployed to facilitate online procurement of
common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments/ Organizations.
GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement. Presently, it
has over 445,000 Sellers & Service Providers and over 2.1 Mn products registered on the
platform.

16. Digitalization through digital infrastructure and platforms provides an unprecedented
opportunity to meet the aspirations of more than 1.3 billion citizens in a transparent, inclusive,
sustainable, efficient and cost effective manner. These objectives are being implemented to
make India a digitally inclusive and empowered society.

I Thank you, Mister/Madam Chair.