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Vice Minister
Ministry of Communications & Information Technology, SAMOA

PANEL DISCUSSION 2: Infrastructure Connectivity: towards a more integrated market, 19th Nov 2018

- Head of the Pacific ESCAP Office, Mr Iosefa Maiava, ITU Regional Director – Asia & Pacific Telecommunication Development Bureau, Mr Ioane Koroivuki, President of PITA, Mr Sione Veikoso, Speakers and Panellist, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, *Bula Vinaka, Talofa Lava*.

- As we are aware as Small Developing Pacific Island States, from Papua New Guinea, being the largest to Nauru, being the smallest, we face a common yet globally unique set of developmental challenges which include but are not limited to the following:

  - our respective populations are small by global comparison;

  - climate change will have a greater impact on us than others;

  - we are isolated from large markets; and

  - in many cases, remittances are a key source of national income.

- Despite these obstacles, we as small Pacific Island States can continue to work together to overcome these challenges. We can address these by working together

on *regionally relevant digital initiatives*, built on *timely exchanges of information* in a cooperative and diversified environment, which will ultimately guide us to overcome, to a large degree, our small size.

- Through enhanced international fibre-based internet connectivity, we can bring markets closer to our Island shores, exposing our sellers to the world, and most importantly reduce the high costs of operation for our Governments and Businesses through telecommuting and online delivery of education and access to training.

- **Connectivity** has reached our shores and is continuing its passage to our region through the vast improvement in infrastructure. We have witnessed this in February 2018 in Samoa, with the landing of our new submarine fibre optic trunk, our national internet bandwidth capacity has, in one jump, expanded to some 800-fold. And that is just the beginning of things to come. Samoa is no longer and will never be as remote as it once was, and we are excited to be able to share our vision for a *"Digital Pacific"* with you.

- Similar leaps forward in the technological world are happening throughout the Region, in the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Tokelau and most recently with the signing of the Manatua Cable in the last two weeks that will connect Tahiti, Cook Islands, Niue and landed in Samoa.

- The big question for us Pacific ICT Champions is:

    - *What can be done to make the most efficient use of these new state of the art infrastructure?*

    - *How can we make sure that our people in the Pacific, including those from smaller islands alike have access to connectivity, to identify the economic opportunities that this digital future will bring to the Region?*

- Investment in connectivity not only can bring high returns on investment and enhance educational opportunities, digital entrepreneurship, but more importantly building our economies towards a more integrated telecom market in the Pacific.

- In June this year, we held the *Inaugural Digital Pacific 2018 in Samoa*. This was co-organised by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and the United Nations system. We were joined by delegates from seven Pacific Island nations as well as digital transformation experts and representatives from the private sector from around the world.

- What has become apparent, something I believe many people in this room will agree with is that, no one country can go alone on digital transformation. **No one**

country can work in isolation given the evolving and fast changing nature of technology. Digital Pacific 2018, marked the beginning of what we hope will be a *regional dialogue* **leading to a** *regional partnership* **for digital transformation.** We need to work together to achieve this. And I am happy to announce that, the Leaders Meeting in Guam has endorsed this initiative and UNDP will continue to host this event annually and will be known as the "*Digital Pacific Week*".

- The **Midterm Review of the S.A.M.O.A Pathway for the Pacific** held in Tonga in June 2018 acknowledged this initiative and marked it in the **Report** as the first intergovernmental mechanism to support rapid integration of technology in the region including through e-Governance across countries, taking a joint approach to ensure transaction costs of such transformations are affordable for all nations to access and benefit.

- Given the advancing stage of connectivity in the Pacific, an intergovernmental approach to closing the digital divide, **introducing national digital IDs and establishing e-Governance systems**, would significantly enhance opportunities for education, employment, business and improved living standards through better access to services at a supersonic pace.

- Taking a joint regional approach in the **National ID system** and the **e-Governance design,** will help us harmonize our systems and significantly minimize costs. ***Samoa has started its journey and is ready to share its lessons!*** Furthermore, our Donors and Development Partners from the Region and beyond, expressed interest in supporting our regional efforts on digital transformation.

- As Leaders of the Pacific in the area of ICT, we see this as intricately connected with **regional security**. In a time where cybercrime is increasing, fake-news is spreading, we must pursue this ambitious agenda with cybersecurity at its core. We must continue to emphasize the importance of technology and digital systems in strengthening in-country, maritime and regional security more broadly and adopting a regional approach would be key to our success.

- The success of our **OnePacific** is **Talanoa**. The success of all our developments, Conferences, Workshops in the Pacific including the Digital Pacific Conference, demonstrated to us and the Region, the ***importance of regional dialogues and partnerships on digital transformation.***

- We must now work together to maximise the impact of connectivity in the Pacific and make technology work for us, for our people!

- Fa'afetai