

(Draft) Statement by Tonga

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Mr. Chairman,

My delegation put great emphasis on the critical role of science, technology and innovation (STI) in bridging the digital divide, in particular to vulnerable economies such as Tonga. As you may know, ICT connectivity (in terms of fixed-broadband subscriptions per 100 people) in Asia and the Pacific has witnessed a phenomenal growth. However, this growth has been uneven. According to the latest ITU data, 21 countries in the ESCAP region have less than 2% fixed broadband penetration rates. Eight of the 21 countries in the ESCAP region with less than 2% fixed broadband penetration are Pacific island countries including my country.

Mr. Chairman,

Accesses to new technologies that lessen the digital divide provide opportunities for all citizens including public and private sectors. The recent experience of ICT connectivity in Tonga has shown that higher connectivity creates latent demand. In addition, increased connectivity increases the resilience of my country to natural disasters. ICT connectivity in Tonga has also spurred new business opportunities (call center established due to fiber optic connection). At the same time, affordability and access to ICT has improved dramatically.

We nevertheless recognize that certain regulatory policy needs to be in place to support ICT infrastructure development. The 'last mile' remains to be a challenge. Some of these challenges could be better handled through regional collaboration and therefore we welcome ESCAP's Asia Pacific Information Superhighway initiative (AP-IS) as one potential option towards promoting ICT connectivity at the regional level.

However, increased connectivity brings challenges of its own to my country. For one, increasing ICT connectivity bring about concerns over cyber security. The capacity of Small island developing states (SIDS) including my country towards developing appropriate technologies to counter cyber security is limited. Hence, we call on ESCAP members to collaborate in this area at the regional level with the view to improve cyber security.

In addition, the development of appropriate technologies needs to take into account the peculiarity of SIDS. For instance, digital divide will continue to be a challenge in my country if access to appropriate energy supply (electricity) is limited. Hence, new technologies need to develop reliable energy sources for ICT connectivity in isolated small island groups not

connected to the electricity grid. At the same time, this technology needs to be made accessible to my country at an affordable price.

Mr. Chairman,

We recognize that research and development into STI is a challenge for vulnerable economies. Therefore, regional collaboration to facilitate technology transfer to vulnerable economies is key.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.