

2019 Asia-Pacific Regional Community Networks Summit
United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) Bangkok, Thailand
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Inaugural Session

(Rough Transcript)

>> Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We are about to begin. Welcome to the Asia-Pacific community network Summit. Before we formally begin I ask the first set of speakers to be ready up on stage. So may I call on Mr. Tiziana Bonaspace, director of ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction, division of UNESCAP. And then we have Rajnesh Singh, the regional director for the Asia-Pacific Internet Society and Kalaya Chinatiaworn, executive director of international affairs division, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, Thailand. Could I please ask you to come up here on stage?

Thank you for being with us here today. It is jointly organized by UNESCAP and Internet Society in conjunction with the third session of the Asia-Pacific Information Super Highway Steering Committee. Community network have enriched a way to connect people and to allow for new cost community driven solutions to be developed to collect people in underserved and unserved locations.

The discussions today will look in to challenges faced by community networks. And we will discuss policy options for infrastructure sharing act, spectrum allocation and Universal Service Fund as well as highlight some of these community network projects in the region as best practice. So to begin the event today to start off our discussions we will have our first set of speakers for our inaugural session.

>> TIZIANA BONASPACE: Good morning, friends. We have had a long series of events during disaster resilience week. I am hoping that we have all made good friendships and deepen friendships over the past week.

And so it is my pleasure to welcome you all once again to this Asia-Pacific Regional community network's summit. It is also a pleasure to have the opportunity to co-organize this event with the Internet Society. We in organizing this event we really saw it as an opportunity to connect all the dots. During disaster resilience week we started off with the Asia-Pacific Super Highway Steering Committee and this Steering Committee is very much oriented to Government policy, to the Intergovernmental policy dialogue and to finding ways to bring about regional seamless connectivity through Intergovernmental cooperation. And then we moved on and we went to the WSIS

regional review and looked more in to the progress and actions taken for implementation of the WSIS Action Lines.

And then finally we come to our event today, and our event today is really then bringing together all the multiple stakeholders who play a crucial role in this information and knowledge society and really bringing about the true meaning of what affordable and inclusive Internet access and usage is all about.

So we would like today to hear from all of you, from the different interests, perspectives that you represent. And the views that will be shared today will play a very important role in guiding the Secretariat for its -- for the future development of its program and for the future implementation of the program.

So broadband for all needs to be developed by all. So it's really a privilege for us to work with the Internet Society. It is an ideal partner to engage this -- to engage all the stakeholders. We have I think a collaboration that dates back a number of years. In 2017 we had a similar event. And I think an important accomplishment from that event in 2017 was the engagement with the organizations that are promoting gender equality and women's participation in the digital space. And we are ensured that these perspectives were brought in to the implementation of the APIS initiative.

So I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Internet Society for its collaboration and also to express our hope that we can continue to deepen the collaboration, in particular in the areas related to Internet traffic management and broadband for all.

So that inclusive broadband access with no one left behind can be brought forward through regional cooperation and through concerted policy making efforts that are supported by inclusive engagement of the private. Sector, academia, and Civil Society organizations. So this is I think a very good example of how we can make it all come together. So I'm optimistic that our discussions and insights from this Summit will lead to concrete actions within the framework of APIS and we will ensure that at the end of the session all the dots are connected and as we move forward until the next time we meet we will be promoting the synthesis of all our efforts towards a common goal of accelerated achievement of the SDGs in the region.

Thank you.

(Applause)

>> RAJNESH SINGH: Thank you, Tiziana, for the warm welcome. I would like to acknowledge that the Internet Society has been working with UNESCAP for several years now. And we have deepened our relationship and done many things together. It pleases us that this year we are able to be part of the

disaster risk week and in particular the APIS meetings. We are running this regional Summit, binds a lot of things that we have been discussing over the last few days together. Some of the presentations earlier in the week with the meetings we could see the potential of what technologies, like 5G technologies, the promise they hold and the potential they hold but at the same time we also have the world is still not online. And Asia-Pacific being the largest part of the world that means in our rural region probably more than half of the people are not online. And I think what also exacerbates the issue that most of the people are in areas that are the hardest to connect. We connected a large part of the world over the last decade or so, but I think this challenge we have before us now, you know, in the deserts and high up in the mountains they are the hardest to connect. There is infrastructure issues that we need to deal with. What is the right policy and regulatory environment for those communities to flourish in when they don't have the nuts and bolts that urban centers have. So there is a lot of -- a whole lot of issues that go in to -- the community deal with in order to work in these -- with these communities.

There have been many efforts over the years, from the ICT for the space, you know, the digital divide was used in the past and it is used today. We bridge it for some of the part but for a large part of the world it remains an issue. The other concern that has been a growing concern I have had over the last year and a half or so in particular is the fact that we decided to create new digital divides. Because if someone, for instance, in the more developed parts of Asia has access to 4G, 5G networks as some countries do, we are still getting places in this region that are still running off 2G networks. They don't have data and, you know, there are so many reports of studies that have been put out that say, you know, getting people online is critical for their future development. It brings more opportunities but those opportunities will only arrive when they actually have equitable access to the Internet and all opportunities that the services run over the Internet, provide those people. So I think the need is very urgent.

Now we can spend a lot of money doing a lot of infrastructure work. But ultimately the money has to come from somewhere. The second we need look at what appropriate technology for a particular environment. We can spend a million dollars setting up a system to serve a community of a thousand people with very fast Internet. But how would you then get an ROI on that for commercial operators? So that's why I think over the last several years in particular we have had little do-it-yourself networks that have flourished. And we have quite a few of those practitioners in the room today. Good to hear

from them what the experiences have been. If no one builds it for them they will build it themselves. And we have seen that happening in many parts of the region. There is lots of solutions available. We need to get people connected. How we actually do it there is multiple ways to do it in. The APIs, Asia-Pacific supply, we have been privileged to be involved in it. And I have always had a lot of firm belief that that is critical to this region. That's why you see my face at every API meeting that's been held. And the reason for that we need to ensure no one gets left behind. And that can only happen if we are able to exchange our knowledge and our experiences and pick up some little ideas that one can perhaps go and implement back home.

So with that again I would like to offer my congratulations to UNESCAP for the events that have been held this week but thank them for being a true and valid partner of the Internet Society and the whole ESCAP team which we have a strong relationship. And I look forward to us continuing that relationship so that we can collaborate further and do the best we can for the peoples of our region. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

>> KALAYA CHINIATIWORKN: Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning. On behalf of the community of the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society of Thailand it is my great pleasure to welcome the Distinguished Delegates to the Community Network Summit. And I would like to extend my sincere thanks to UNESCAP and the Internet Society for inviting me to attend this meaningful event. Today's Summit can be attached on important issues that (inaudible) and other stakeholders have been working extensively to expand affordable Internet access to their citizens but then the potential that the Internet -- our Internet based technology brings to our countries community, economically, socially and environmentally. Half the more than 25 years of Internet development however there still remains profile connectivity gap in many parts of the world. Particularly in developing nations, leaving half of the population with our Internet access. According to the report around 55% of the population are unconnected. In terms of in lower -- in low income countries and lower middle income countries in the region and especially low with 0.5% and 2.5% respectively. Compared to the advanced allowed 50%.

Other lower income countries have experienced rapid focus of mobile broadband. But this pilot are income countries in affordable Internet through mobile device remain huge. Traditionally for (inaudible) barrier reported as left responsible for lack of Internet adoption that are the lack of connectivity but nonaffordability of the international access.

Finally the lack of relevant of the service and contains. Consequence of being unconnected are undocumented. Why it is that Internet access and socioeconomic development and transformation, it also means that those without access are left behind. Facing to competitive and economic disadvantages, in terms of access to information and knowledge, productivity goes in compilation and overall improvement. This is for people in rural and remote areas where key -- is last mile connectivity. The lack of commercial viability as well as huge networks will also cause worried operators who are reluctant to make necessary investment in rural lands and make expansion of connectivity network enforceable.

As such the lower accuracy -- become even more wider to reach next -- the next 2 billion and connect it to innovation, (inaudible) changes. That can held a cost -- the course last mile connectivity gaps and offer affordable access to a substantial part of the population. With that it is necessary to create appropriate frameworks that allow small operators, local entrepreneurs and communities to serve their own connectivity challenges. The (inaudible) Thai Government is truly aware that digital infrastructure is the key mechanism to create more opportunity for future economy and social development.

So the Government has created -- carried out a number of (inaudible) to enable the country to achieve the goals. One flagship projects is the village broadband Internet which is a major driving force behind Thailand for policy localsy. The purpose of the special project is to expand the high speed Internet network to cover our villages throughout Thailand so that local people who live in remote areas will be able to access broadband Internets and those who live in cities. Fiber optic networks are deplored. Each is provided with a WiFi hot spot free of charge. Up until now the high speed Internet to 24,700 villages and by the end of this year Thailand will become a broadband nation by providing Internet access to 75,000 villages.

It provides equitable and affordable access to ICTs. Our digital technology across the country which is a crucial factor to develop innovation and improve the quality of lives of people in the rural areas as well as Thai people can easily access through public service and enhancing opportunity to generate income and employment in local communities. In relation ministry has also been developing a nationwide digital community center network to support smart adoption of digital technology and promote digital technology in all rural areas. Offering this occupational learning including providing space of community economic and social activity, that yesterday my

secretary also shared about the experience of Thailand in this project. Yesterday only.

And Ladies and Gentlemen, I observe that we have mixed (inaudible) partitioners of academic and Civil Society representatives from all parts of the region that have come -- that have come together to discuss and share our experience. Also we have a topical and exciting theme on the agenda that specifically will (inaudible) on The Last Mile Connectivity issue as well as complimentary and sustainable solution to exciting connectivity gaps. It is such an appreciation that ESCAP and ISOC have brought up this important discussion under APIS initiative and will build a momentum among countries who promote access and affordability and design of Internet broadband in the region.

I'm confident that by working closely together our Asia-Pacific Region will continue to excel in promoting SAT connectivity and as a -- and processable development. With that I wish you a successful meeting and productive Summit. Thank you.

(Applause)