



UN-OHRLS

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE
LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

Remarks

by

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High Representative
and

Under-Secretary-General

for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

at the

Regional Meeting for the Asia-Pacific LDCs “Towards Graduation: A focus on Broadband Con-
nectivity”

26 October 2017

09:00

Warwick Le Lagon, Port Vila

Your Excellency Mr Bruno Leingkone, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International cooperation and External Trade of the Republic of Vanuatu

Your Excellency Georgina Roberts, High Commissioner of NZ

Your Excellency Odi Tevi, Permanent Representative of Vanuatu to the United Nations, and members of the Diplomatic Corps

Mr Kieran Mulvey,

Chief Executive Officers, Senior Government Officials & Representatives of the Regional and International organisations

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends

It feels good to be back in the Pacific region

My sincere gratitude goes to the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu for getting us together and your warm hospitality in your beautiful country.

Excellency,

tangkyu tumas!

I also must express to you and the peoples of Ambae my thoughts and full solidarity in light of recent events. I understand a gradual resettlement is underway.

A warm welcome to all of you Distinguished Delegates attending this important regional meeting for the Asia-Pacific LDCs and the Pacific-SIDS.

This meeting is the second such meeting convened by UN-OHRLLS on the critical theme of broadband connectivity.

The first meeting was held in Senegal in March this year for the African LDCs.

It is my hope that our meeting will provide for you to share experiences on what has been done successfully already and why it was successful and what we must do to increase broadband connectivity by leaving nobody and no place behind.

I just attended a meeting in Cabo Verde on local economic development and the importance of localising now the globally agreed SDGs if we want to meet the goals we set ourselves in Agenda 2030.

Connectivity will be a key driver in realising the ambitions of the SDGs and so not only can we not afford to leave anyone behind but we also must leave no place behind in connectivity.

AND connectivity will be key to structural transformation, graduations from LDC status and key to a sustainable development for all.

It will be key to face the many complex issues we are confronted with including climate change !

So allow me to share a few thoughts with you and to also give you a little background on what OHRLLS has been asked to do by the member states that created it in 2001.

We all have followed what happened during the last couple months marked by an unprecedented series of violent hurricanes in the Caribbean, by wildfires and other natural catastrophes.

I am sure many of you have children communicating via WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter - how many times have we heard that these new means of communication have allowed to locate people, know how they are, where incidents happen?

We may not be happy with all the time they spend online but we always are happy when we can reach them in seconds and imagine what that means in a disaster!!!

Yet, too many people and places are entirely left behind and thus excluded from rapid response and left to their own survival struggles.

Now, climate change beyond a doubt threatens us with ever more frequent and severe disasters.

And the island nations of the Pacific have long been aware how climate change is a threat to the very existence of our people.

With rising ocean temperatures fuelling increasing extreme weather events, the exposure of the most vulnerable countries to these exogenous shocks rises.

The situation is such that we have no time to loose to move from words to action and to step up support to countries for mitigation and resilience building. Connectivity will be a deciding factor in that and thus this will have to include broadband access.

Given the climate change importance to small island nations, I chose this example.

I could also have chosen the links between connectivity and tele-medicine, links with education, links with innovation.

But I am sure you all need no convincing about the importance of broadband to your countries' development.

So how does OHRLLS come into this equation you may wonder.

OHRLLS is a key advocate, it is mandated to leverage the entire UN system capacities in supports of the OHRLLS countries group, and act as indeed a voice, a facilitator for 91 vulnerable countries with a combined population in excess of 1 billion people or roughly 1/7th of the world's population.

47 of these vulnerable countries are Least Developed Countries, 32 are Landlocked Developing Countries and 38 are Small Island Developing States.

The special settings and vulnerabilities of these groups of countries are captured in specific international agreements of action you may already be familiar with: the Istanbul Programme of Action, the Vienna Programme of Action and the SAMOA Pathway.

These three programmes of action recognize that information and communication technologies are key to allowing individuals and businesses to participate in what we now call the knowledge economy.

In an overarching way, the world community's 2030 Agenda includes unconditional support to these areas.

SDG 9 on resilient infrastructure, inclusive and sustainable industrialization calls for "significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020." The sad reality is that LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS are lagging far behind in internet access, with some of the lowest rates to be found in the LDCs.

Whereas over 80 per cent of the population in the developed world will be using the internet by the end of this year, it is estimated that only 17.5 per cent will be using the Internet in LDCs !

You could argue that for the LDCs, this is a significant improvement when compared to the 4% Internet penetration recorded in 2010.

Maybe we can all agree that the progress is very slow if not too slow and that this is not good enough.

OHRLLS and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in a recent joint report estimated that at the current rate, it will take more than fifteen years for the LDCs to get over half their citizens online.

Now the ICT SDGs targets are to be achieved by 2020 - do the maths and the SDG target on ICTs, which is also reflected in the IPOA (I guess Istanbul Programme of Action ...), would be met by about 2033.

When we looked at access to broadband internet, there are four times as many mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in developed countries as there are in LDCs.

So, there is a long way to go before catching up.

But we also have success stories.

For example, Internet users in Cambodia increased by about 16 percentage points between 2011 and 2015.

Our host country Vanuatu and a few other Asia-Pacific LDCs, for example Nepal and Bhutan, have seen significant increases in internet access.

There are also very promising and innovative developmental applications to mention.

In Myanmar, a maternal healthcare app makes available a wealth of useful maternal, child health and wellness information to women during and after pregnancy. The service also improves access to health professionals and treatment, as required, by allowing users to search a database of information on the location and contact details of health workers and clinics.

Another innovative example is with any doubt our host country's use of drones in to conduct damage assessments in the wake of Cyclone Pam. I

In Bangladesh, a team at the Robotic Embedded Systems Laboratory tested a network of 48 manual arsenic biosensors to monitor water quality. This is key to saving lives!

So again, beyond a doubt, investment in and leveraging broadband throughout all aspects of a country's and its peoples' being has demonstrated high value-add and is a must.

Distinguished Delegates, Friends

Yes we live at a complex , challenging time, rapidly changing moment in our shared planet's history and as the Secretary-General H.E. A. Guterres said in his message for United Nations Day on 24 October:

I quote

Our world faces many grave challenges. Widening conflicts and inequality. Extreme weather and deadly intolerance. Security threats - including nuclear weapons. We have the tools and wealth to overcome these challenges; All we need is the will. (end of quote)

Will indeed it requires,

will to put the incredible advances of technology to good use for the human dignity for all people.

This is why we must identify how we can accelerate the development of the ICT sector for the countries OHRLLS stands for and that means we must find ways to ensuring widespread broadband connectivity.

Otherwise we run the risk that countries such as LDCs and SIDS will be left even further behind and become even more vulnerable.

For this reason, OHRLLS together with partners and with the Government of Turkey spearheaded the set-up of the Technology Bank for LDCs.

This Bank's goal is to enhance Science Technology and Innovation capacity in the LDCs and it was formally signed into being on 22 September 2017. This has been a long-standing priority for the LDCs.

The Bank, an entity of the United Nations, has a far-reaching mandate.

One of the areas I expect the Technology Bank to focus on starting next year is digital access to research and knowledge.

Increasing access to a fast internet for scientists and researchers, for facilitating exchanges will be crucial. Indeed, the whole idea of a technology bank is built on broadband access.

I also then have to highlight a couple challenges I see and that we must overcome rapidly:

The first is the need to expand the supply of infrastructure. LDCs rely almost exclusively on mobile broadband networks to deliver high-speed Internet access to end users, including many businesses. In the immediate there remains need to continue to invest in wired infrastructure, both in terms of national backbone and international connectivity. At the moment, this provides a reliable and often more affordable option for among others, downloading large files.

The second issue is affordability. We said leave no one and no place behind and so we must find ways to ensure the availability of affordable services for all.

Affordability right now is a barrier to those who have coverage but cannot afford the Internet or cannot afford to use it as much as they would like. Only eleven LDCs have mobile broadband tariffs meeting the Broadband Commission target of less than 5 per cent of Gross National Income per capita.

Bhutan has managed to address this. It has the lowest relative mobile Internet prices among the LDCs at less than one percent of Gross National Income per capita. Mobile coverage has been extended to remote areas using universal service funds. Affordability is further enhanced through free Internet access at some 200 community centers spread across the country.

Given the rapid market, provider and technology changes we also must continuously review legal and regulatory frameworks through comparison, learning and international benchmarking.

A final point that I want to raise is that of increasing digital literacy.

While supply side factors are important, extending access must go hand in hand with increasing digital literacy for women, men, boys and girls.

This implies the development of relevant content in different forms and new services in local languages. In short, make access user-friendly in its applications! This is critically important in ensuring that access to broadband translates into positive development outcomes.

So it now is my sincere hope that during the course of the next couple days, we will hear about and exchange in frank discussions about your various experiences in the area of ICT in general and broadband connectivity in particular.

It will be important to focus on what works, what does not work and why and what the challenges are that you face. And then let us come up with hands-on, practicable recommendations on how to best respond to the challenges.

To help frame discussions, OHRLLS has commissioned two case studies on Cambodia and Vanuatu.

The initial findings of these case studies will be shared in the next session.

This is in line with the case studies we did for the first workshop and they cover Rwanda and Senegal. You can find these reports online.

We will also have an expert group meeting side event. The findings of this expert group meeting will be reported on tomorrow morning.

It truly is uplifting to see you all here and to see a diverse, rich experience represented with representation of LDCs and Pacific-SIDS, development partners, private sector, multilateral agencies, the media and all other non-state actors. I am convinced it is the richness of our diverse experiences, knowledge that will lead to innovative thinking at our meeting.

I look forward to listening to your views, perspectives and to learn from your experiences.

Grace Mera Molisa, famous daughter of our host country and child of Ambae, showed pathbreaking courage and determination and unwavering love for her country to move forward, so let us live up with the same courage and determination to the responsibilities before us.

Thank you.