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Opening Statement

by

MR. VINCEZO AQUARO

**CHIEF OF DIVISION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to deliver this opening statement on behalf of Ms. Haiyan Qian, Director of Division for Public Administration and Development Management of UNDESA and also in my capacity as Chief of the e-Government Branch.

I would like to pay special tribute to the high-level dignitaries that honor us today with their presence.

In particular, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to His Excellency, Minister Hyung-Kyu Maeng of the Ministry of Public Administration and Security (MOPAS) of the Republic of Korea for his support to this conference.

I am grateful to Your Excellencies and distinguished participants from many different parts of the Asia-Pacific region for enabling this opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience in e-Government.

The geographic range of participants indicates that many governments all around the region are indeed striving to improve e-Government policies in support of national development.

Furthermore, a number of Asian countries have used their respective e-government policies to advance the UN internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Effective e-government policies has been a key factor towards transparency, accountability, avoiding corruption and leakages, streamlining welfare benefits and having various other pro-poor benefits.

At the same time, as remarked by Mr. Sha Zukang in his welcome video, the digital gap is still a challenge which we must address together, in a spirit of cooperation under the UN umbrella.

My expectation is that the Conference on e-Government in Asia and Pacific contributes to meeting the challenges of the digital gap, by facilitating successful experiences, knowledge sharing among those who are in a position to improve the quality of e-government and public service delivery, and help explore ways to enhance cooperation.

The five sessions Of the conference takes the above in the consideration and hopefully creates an interactive environment that enables all participants to actively get involved in the discussions.

The First Session of the Conference will address e-Government Development in the Asia-Pacific Region, including current issues, opportunities, perceived challenges and their relationship to national development.

Indeed as you know, e-Government policy has been growing in the development agenda.

The Asia and Pacific regions pioneer our global effort to hold regional e-Government Development Conferences and establish an informal network of Chief Information Officers worldwide, among other activities.

Perhaps the most serious challenge for Asia and Pacific is the fact that it embodies the same contrasts found at the global level, including significant infrastructure, education and online index contrasts in e-Government development between Eastern and Southern Asia, for example.

Another challenging feature is that apparently in the less developed sub-regions most portals and websites have remained stagnant since 2008, without developing features for civic engagement which are now widely spread in selected Eastern Asian countries.

My expectation is that these contrasts will be addressed and discussed. Ideally, we would be able to outline lessons learned and concrete cooperation possibilities to transform information exchange into action, in partnership with all of you.

Hopefully this exercise will also serve the purpose of guiding other Regions on how to promote pragmatic intra-Regional e-Government cooperation to address national development goals.

From the prospective of United Nations and particularly of DESA, as preliminary contribution of the conference's debate I will spend few minutes to share with you a few key global e-Government trends.

The first trend concerns the “Whole of government and one-stop service provision” - an increasing number of Governments realize that instead of making citizens go to ten different institutions it makes much more sense to connect these ten institutions so that public services are rendered more easily and effectively. We are interested in find out whether governments are creating one-stop service organizations through which citizens can access a wide range of services and undertake a wide range of transactions.

The second one concerns “Accessibility of Internet or mobile connectivity to all” Our interest is to continue promoting electronic and mobile Government as a powerful development tool for good governance. Currently there are countries that have more cell phones than people. However, the potential for mobile Government applications remains surprisingly low. We are going to assess:

- whether governments have shown an interest in Internet penetration by either publishing statistics or providing a policy statement in this regard;

- whether government sites are correctly displayed on mobile phones and whether separate m-government sites are developed; and
- whether governments are promoting free Internet access, either in government buildings or through various 'hotspots'.

Other two self-explanatory trends include the “Accessibility of services to vulnerable groups” as well as “Multi-channel service provision” to diversify access and transform e-Government into an effective citizen engagement mechanism. We are going to assess:

- whether governments are providing customized services to the poor, the illiterate, the elderly, the young, women, immigrants; and other vulnerable groups;
- whether e-services are customized to their needs and what personalization features can be found on government portals.

Last trend I want to mention today is related to “User take-up and training” As you well-know it is not enough to design, develop and put on line an excellent portal, if user take-up and capacity to follow-up remains low. We are going to assess governments' capacity building efforts in providing training facilities and programmes to users. Most measures of the initiative will be served by proxy indicators, i.e. they will be indicative of a government's interest in usage and training rather than necessarily providing a measure of take-up per se.

Before moving to the second Session let me conclude adding some concerns about the connections between e-Government and **sustainability** – also motivated by the Rio + 20 Conference, called by the General Assembly to be held in Rio in June 2012.

We strongly believe that e-Government can have an important catalytic role in promoting and supporting the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainability. From our prospective, this initiative is a new effort to assess whether and how governments address environmental concerns by providing either e-environment information like general statement on sustainability, clean air and water, climate change; environmental regulations and standards or information on e-environment services user interaction through online poll, survey discussion forum or chat on environmental issues; air quality reports and forecast; linkages to local authorities dealing with environment issues, etcetera.

All these global trends will be assessed and reported in the forthcoming 2012 e-Government Survey.

The Second Session of the Conference will address institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks including particularly CIO/ e-Government officials Forum.

This Forum will facilitate knowledge-sharing, while also exploring ways of collaborations among CIOs and e-Government officials. I see this as another major challenge as the institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks for e-Government development vary tremendously between regions and countries. The challenge is to outline “unity within diversity”. In other words I expect that it will be possible to outline some key elements that would allow us to elaborate guidelines to support countries in the improvement of their frameworks for e-Government development. My main concern is not to be prescriptive, but to be able to record regional guiding principles to promote change and improvement in e-government policy and practice, based on the vast experience gathered in this conference room.

Another challenge is to strike a balance between freedom of information and open Government on the one hand, with data protection and cyber security considerations on the other. We note the current trend that many Government are issuing simultaneously freedom of information acts and cyber security legislations, frequently without coordination between two.

The Third Session of the Conference will focus on country specific e-Government experiences.

As you know, countries show enormous constrains in terms of geographical area, population, density, socio-economic levels, political history, cultural characteristics, Geo-physical limitations, disaster-prone situations and other specificities. We also know that ICTs as a tool can support Governments bridging these differences but can not provide the solution per se.

This matter goes well beyond cyber-optimism or cyber-pessimism. In very concrete terms, we will be interested to learn more about challenges and opportunities for e-Government in land-locked countries, in small island developing states, in conflict and post conflict situations and in areas affected by disasters. All of us are aware that, that contrary to popular belief, post-conflict, post-disaster and other challenging situations may also present opportunities of leapfrogging development by adopting innovative practices of public administration including the use of ICTs in government to accelerate service delivery.

We are also aware that e-Government policies can promote faster sharing and utilization of information, enhanced coordination with relevant stakeholders, improved efficiency, outreach to remote areas, greater transparency and accountability and 24/7 availability of governmental information and services. ICTs can cut across sectors and can provide support to governance processes critical for building public services. The question we should like to address is – within this different groups - what kind of lessons learned from all these situations should be disseminated – and how – to promote more systemic guidance to leapfrog development in Asia and Pacific.

In this regard, let me introduce the Fourth Thematic Session of the Conference presenting one of our latest initiatives of UNDESA, called United Nations Public Administration Country Studies, or its acronym UNPACS.

UNPACS is envisioned as a comprehensive, up-to-date and readily accessible on line knowledge-base in public administration. It will help governments in making evidence-based decisions by providing country data and global views and trends on conventional and emerging topics related to public administration on all 192 UN Member States. It builds on and replaces the previous project of UNDESA on electronic and mobile global knowledge repository.

I am pleased to inform you that the UNPACS technical platform is almost finalized at this stage. Content is being categorized by countries and regions, and by themes with relevant linkages to the mandate of DPADM and specific goals of the MDGs.

Within the field of e-government development, the first stage of UNPACS includes information on the following sub-themes: National strategies and policies on e-government

and ICT-led development, legal and regulatory framework and Chief Information Officers or equivalent, as well as institutional frameworks.

However, collecting information on e-government is just the first step in a cycle that adds value to our knowledge and UNPACS wants to become a tool to create a sort of knowledge value-added chain, fed by projects, products, technical cooperation and other institutional commitments like conferences, forums, etc.

In the last session, the fifth, the possibility of producing a Country e-Government Briefs will be explored.

Well beyond the collection of documents and other resources in UNPACS, this exercise of e-government brief represents a first concrete example of the second step of this cycle on how we can produce a knowledge value-added product. A first prototype under development by UNDESA will be introduced and feedback solicited on the concepts and utility of producing e-Government briefs in standardized format and their relevance to e-government policymakers.

In conclusion, we can clearly see that the Asia and Pacific region is vast and includes countries at different levels of e-government. This creates a challenge that other regions do not face and thus put the Asia and Pacific in a unique situation. My desire is that this conference creates strategic partnerships between those countries that are successful with those countries that need some assistance to work in concert to improve the e-government situation in the region as a whole.

I would like to end my statement by paraphrasing the last UN Committee Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) as they stated "The transformation of Government into e-Government is an irreversible process. Most governments see the "e" in e-government as it applies only to "electronic", but the effective ones see the "e" as empowered".

Thank you for your attention.