

Statement delivered by Ms. Shanchita Haque, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations on behalf of the Least Developed Countries in the Second Committee on Agenda Item 16: Information and Communications Technologies for Development
New York, 13 October 2017, 3-6 pm

Thank you, Mr. Chair

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of LDCs. The Group aligns itself with the statement made by Ecuador on behalf of the G77.

We thank the Secretary General for his report entitled "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels".

ICTs have proven to be a catalyst for fostering economic growth, strengthening productivity and competition, and widening knowledge base. It is a strong driving force for empowering billions of people with knowledge and information.

The 2030 Agenda aptly recognizes that the spread of information and communications technologies and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies. Target 9.c of the 2030 Agenda sets an ambitious benchmark to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020, which is just 3 years from now.

However, the current ICT situation in the LDCs is not very encouraging. ITU suggests that majority of the least connected countries are the LDCs. The State of Broadband 2017 Report identifies growing digital inequality between developed and developing countries. It notes that less than half of the world's population is currently connected to the internet and fewer than 1 in 10 people in least developed countries are connected.

There are 20 mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 people in the LDCs. The cost of access is also higher in these countries in relation to average household income, resulting in a lack of affordable access to information and communications technologies. Connectivity and e-commerce capabilities are especially challenging in LDCs.

Moreover, a gender digital divide persists in the LDCs and the proportion of women using the internet is 31 percent lower than the proportion of men using the Internet in the LDCs.

Even disparities prevail within countries especially between rural and urban areas. Moreover, innovations in ICT that are now available have largely been designed to meet the needs of the developed world. Only market force cannot meet the needs of LDCs.

To harness the maximum benefits out of ICT, a number of auxiliary factors need to be put in place. Technology needs to be supported by appropriate know-how, institutions, public-private partnerships and a vibrant business climate.

With a view to realizing the SDG 9.c in LDCs, and to harness maximum benefits out of ICTs, we would recommend the following specific measures:

First: ICTs are becoming more central to the development of economies and societies and they would continue to play a critical role in the success of the 2030 Agenda. It is important for countries to adopt appropriate policies and strategies to ensure availability, affordability and accessibility to ICT services including broadband technologies. The policies need to be coupled with modern infrastructure and service delivery systems.

Second: The ICT services and facilities must be combined with the relevant skills, capabilities and opportunities. Appropriate training and education is vitally important to provide necessary ICT literacy and numeracy of the citizens to seize the opportunity that the modern ICT offers. More efforts should be made for capacity building of the LDCs with regard to cyber security issues.

Third: The full participation of women in the information society and women's access to information and communications technologies for development, including new technologies, must be ensured.

Fourth: LDCs need appropriate technologies and relevant know-how to adapt and commercialize them taking into account the local needs and circumstances. The newly established Technology Bank for LDCs can foster the transfer of appropriate technologies and know-how to LDCs. We urge all development partners and other stakeholders to generously contribute to this Bank.

Fifth: LDCs also need adequate financial support to build their ICT networks, especially broadband networks. Resources for procuring necessary instruments, hardware and software to get access to modern equipment and facilities is also a challenge for the LDCs.

Sixth: A more robust international cooperation between the developed countries and the LDCs is required for addressing the challenges the latter are facing in ICTs. South-South and Triangular Cooperation can also be a potential framework for partnership in the field of ICT. There should be more concrete initiatives among the countries in the South to exchange their innovations, experiences, lessons learnt and best practices.

Finally: Development partners have made concrete commitment in the IPoA to continue providing places and scholarships for students and trainees from LDCs, particularly in the fields of science, technology, business management and economics. This commitment is resonated in target 4.b of the 2030 Agenda. We want to see significant progress in its realization.

I thank you all for your kind attention.