

**ASEAN - Joint Statement at The World Summit of Information Society (WSIS)
Geneva, 10 December 2003**

PREAMBLE

1. The Ministers for Telecommunications and Information Technology of Member Countries of ASEAN noted that a primary aim of the Information Society must be to facilitate full utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT) at all levels in society and hence enable the sharing of social and economic benefits by all, by means of ubiquitous access to information networks, while preserving diversity and cultural heritage.

2. The Ministers further noted the importance of the role ICT can play to spur sustainable growth within ASEAN, attract ICT investments; and being aware that the recent ASEAN ICT developments such as the bridging of ASEAN digital divide, the support of works in Youth and Gender in ICT and the implementation of Universal Service Obligations (USO) schemes contribute positively to enhance the sense of community and connectedness among ASEAN countries, endorsed the sharing of the ASEAN experiences on ICT to facilitate global learning and building of the Information Society.

OVERVIEW OF THE E-ASEAN FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

3. In 2000, ASEAN Heads of Governments signed the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement to enable the region to benefit from the opportunities offered by the revolution in infocommunications technology and electronic commerce. This initiative aims to spur the development of the economy, society and government for the region to prosper and be plugged into the global community.

4. The ASEAN Leaders' objective for e-ASEAN is to promote co-operation to develop, strengthen and enhance the competitiveness of the ICT sector in ASEAN, reduce the digital divide within individual ASEAN economies and amongst Member States, as well as between the public and private sectors to realise the e-ASEAN vision, and to liberalise trade and investment in ICT to support the e-ASEAN initiative.

5. The Agreement rests on 6 pillars:

- i. Establish the ASEAN Information Infrastructure;
- ii. Facilitate growth of electronic commerce;
- iii. Liberalize trade and investments in infocomm;
- iv. Facilitate trade in infocomm products and services; and
- v. Build capacity and an e-Society.
- vi. Promote the use of ICT applications in the delivery of government services (e-Government).

MILESTONES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

6. The e-ASEAN framework agreement has forged stronger ties among ASEAN member states and fostered wider regional ICT co-operation. Milestones include:

i. Common Reference Framework for e-Commerce Legislation

In 2001, e-ASEAN published a Common Reference Framework for ASEAN E-Commerce Legal Infrastructure. The reference framework will be a guide for ASEAN member states that do not have any e-commerce legislation to draft their own. For ASEAN member states that already have e-commerce laws in place, the framework also serves to facilitate cross-border e-commerce and the cross-recognition/cross-certification of digital certificates/digital signatures.

ii. E-Readiness Study

In 2001, the e-ASEAN Working Group commissioned an independent e-Readiness Study. The overall objective of the project was to assess the e-readiness of Member Countries in order to formulate regional infocomm policies and recommendations.

iii. ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangements for trade liberalisation and facilitation

The ASEAN Sectoral MRA on Telecommunications Equipment was launched during the first ASEAN TELMIN meeting in July 2001 in Malaysia. Mutual recognition or acceptance of test reports and equipment certification will enhance trade of telecommunications equipment within ASEAN.

A Joint Sectoral Committee (JSC) was established under the MRA to oversee the effective functioning and implementation of the Sectoral MRA. To date, two members have announced their readiness to enter into Phase 1 of the MRA, while another will be ready by December 2003.

iv. ASEAN Digital Divide Database

In August 2002, ASEAN Telecommunications Ministers agreed to the implementation of projects to narrow the digital divide between developed and less-developed ASEAN countries. Also, to facilitate the transformation of ASEAN into a knowledge-based economy through the adoption and usage of ICT products and services. This was envisaged to be done through universally accessible networks, and competitive and affordable ICT products and services.

Towards this, a working group was established to make a concerted effort in bridging the digital divide amongst member countries.

Since then, ASEAN has taken the first step in bridging the digital divide by measuring the extent to which it is prevalent in ASEAN. Secondly, a publicly accessible digital divide database, ASEANconnect, (www.aseanconnect.gov.my) has been established to serve as a knowledgebase to house key data statistics and measurement indicators, analysis of initiatives and information related to the digital divide within ASEAN. This will enable decisions makers to use the information as part of their analysis and planning enabling more effective implementation of projects towards bridging the digital divide

within ASEAN.

v. Promotion of e-Society

A number of ICT training programs, workshops, dialogues and seminars were conducted to share experiences of the ASEAN members:

- a. the SchoolNet seminar and forum encouraged and enabled schools and universities to implement distance learning via the Internet,
- b. an Asia Incubator workshop assisted SMEs and entrepreneur groups,
- c. an e-ASEAN Open Source Software (OSS) Working Group shared information and best practices to provide a cost-effective alternative computer software development, and
- d. an ASEAN e-Measurement Forum will develop a comprehensive set of ASEAN ICT indicators, which will help monitor the progress in ICT sector in the region.
- e. a workshop to raise awareness and knowledge as well as optimising opportunities for ICT use by women was held under the auspices of the ITU.
- f. at the 3rd TELMIN, an ASEAN youth dialogue was held with telecommunication and IT ministers to highlight interest and contribution of youth for future ICT development.

Several public awareness programs were conducted:

- a. ICT road shows/technical forums,
- b. e-ASEAN Business Forum,
- c. e-ASEAN Industry Dialogue, and
- d. promotion of e-Commerce and e-Government.

A number of ICT training programs were conducted for ASEAN LDCs under the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI). This includes a Primer on Cyberlaws for senior public officials held in Singapore in November 2002 and included participation from all ASEAN countries.

vi. Development of Regulatory Models

ASEAN Regulators have agreed to develop non-binding regulatory models on best practices in three key areas namely (i) Competition Management and Interconnection; (ii) Convergence and New Services, and (iii) Cooperation on Capacity Building. These models will serve as approaches and guidelines that ASEAN Regulators could use as reference materials in developing new legislations, develop regulatory practices or establishing their respective systems and processes.

FROM GENEVA TO TUNIS

7. ASEAN is pleased to be associated with the efforts to address the global challenge in this millennium – that of building the information society and the strong desire to contribute positively and to share relevant experiences among member states.

8. ASEAN hopes that the World Summit on Information Society would enable countries to begin their integration into the global infocomm community. Progressing from Phase 1 in Geneva to the next phase in Tunis, we are of the view that the success of a global

information society is grounded upon the following guiding principles:

- a. the global strategy to realise the Information Society must be based on concrete milestones rather than broad visions;
- b. the Plan of Action should be adapted to each region's unique and diverse needs; and
- c. existing regional initiatives such as e-ASEAN should be leveraged upon when implementing programmes.