Statement by
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International Conference on
Smart E-Government for a Better Future
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Delivered by pre-recorded video

Honourable Minister Maeng Hyung Kyu
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to take part in this exciting conference on Smart E-Government for a Better Future, and I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to His Excellency Minister Kyu, the Minister of Public Administration and Security of the Republic of Korea, for hosting the meeting together with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through UN Project on Governance, managed by my Division. Regrettably, duties at Headquarters prevent me from joining you in person.

As custodian of the United Nations programme on public administration, I would like to share with you some ideas about what a better future might look like and how the transformative power of e-government can help take us there.

More than 10 years ago, world leaders set 2015 as the deadline for achieving a set of specific targets on poverty alleviation, education, gender equality, child and maternal health, environmental protection, prevention of communicable diseases and a global partnership for development – the well-known Millennium Development Goals – more commonly known as the MDGs.

The MDGs have made a huge impact on the lives of billions. Extreme poverty has fallen in every region; the proportion of people without access to decent water has been cut in half; housing conditions have improved for more than 200 million slum dwellers; 40 million more children are attending school; the world has achieved parity in primary education between girls and boys; and an estimated 5.2 million people in low and middle-income countries are now receiving life-saving HIV treatment.

But progress has been uneven. Some 800 million people are still living in hunger. And, in some countries, especially those faced by conflict, progress has lagged on all

fronts, leaving many of the most vulnerable behind. And even if the MDGs are fully achieved, much unfinished business will remain. Almost 1 billion people will still be living in extreme poverty and there will be continuing gaps on hunger, health, gender equality, water, sanitation and many other issues.

What is the future we want? The peoples of the world are looking to the UN to help them achieve prosperity, equity, freedom, dignity and peace beyond 2015. And, as you may know, a global conversation has begun about how to define a concrete sustainable development framework that embodies these bold, ambitious and universal values.

How does this relate to e-government? It is my firm belief that without public administration reform and modernization, realizing a better future for all will be extremely difficult. Where capable institutions are lacking, governments are incapacitated, and where governments are incapacitated, sustainable development falls short. It is that simple. And because technological innovation – especially information and communications technology – underpins institutional transformation in the modern age, e-government leaders have a critical role to play in the development process.

Thanks to your efforts, institutional strengthening is continuing to occur in most countries, sometimes at a very rapid pace. The advances we note in online service delivery around the world each year are cause for celebration.

Governments are increasing efficiency and transparency by providing more information online, simplifying administrative procedures, streamlining bureaucratic functions and increasingly providing open government data. For example, in 2012, 70 per cent of countries provided a consolidated one-stop-shop portal compared with 26 per cent in 2003. This not only makes it easier for citizens to find public services, but it encourages governments to integrate processes across departments and increase efficiency.

Advances in e-government have not gone unnoticed by citizens. Extensive online and mobile applications, investment in advanced telecommunication infrastructure, and a regulatory environment that promotes open government while ensuring privacy and security have resulted in rates of e-government take-up exceeding 50 per cent in some of the more advanced countries.

Several governments have also been active in promoting e-participation, using the Internet to engage a much wider range of stakeholders in public policy-making than would otherwise be impossible through traditional channels. Consultative mechanisms will be integral to governance systems of the future, and there is much to learn from the experiences of countries that have been active in this field.

This is hard work, and opportunities and ideas too often outstrip resources. What are the ingredients of smart e-government? First, e-government strategies need to be directed, meaning citizen-centric, collaborative, flexible and inclusive in order to support national development objectives that put people first. Citizen-centric services that include provisions for public consultation and that address the needs of all are the ends towards which e-government activities should be conveyed.

In designing e-government programmes and assessing their impact on national development, every e-government leader should ask three fundamental questions.

- First, does every citizen have access, on general terms of equality, to public services?
- Second, does every citizen, through online and mobile channels, have the opportunity to participate in public affairs?
- Third, are citizens satisfied with the services they receive, as parents, workers, students, health care beneficiaries or whatever other group to which they may belong?

The means for doing so are multifaceted. Based on what we have observed and learned in countries around the world is that a whole-of-government approach is a very effective way of expanding the citizen-centric design of public service delivery. In addition, progress is smoothed if there is a national e-government coordinating authority in operation that is vested with the necessary authority, adequately resourced and situated in a planning agency or other business-driven executive function.

Usage of e-government services by individuals must also continue to be promoted so that online and mobile interaction with public agencies becomes the norm. Every available service delivery channel should be explored and open government data initiatives must be expanded. These and other important concerns will be the subject of the next UN E-Government Survey.

If e-government leaders can make progress on all of these fronts between now and end of 2015, administrators will be well-prepared to tackle post-2015 objectives whatever they may be in national and local contexts. To my mind, e-government that puts ICT at the service of citizens in building the world they want is the essence of smart e-government for a better future.

Moving forward, I believe that international cooperation is essential to push e-government ahead both on regional fronts and on a global level. Countries, such as the Republic of Korea, have been playing important roles through the sharing of their e-government experiences and raising the bar beyond their borders. Indeed, I applaud the timeliness of this international conference in bringing global e-government leaders together.

With hindsight, the significance of the role of e-government in sustainable development has, unfortunately, not been given due recognition and emphasis in the current development agenda on the global stage.

While we continue to take lead in our own capacities to further e-government development, I hope our consolidated effort will push for e-government to be included in the global development agenda, including the United Nations' new framework after 2015.

The future belongs to everyone.

Thank you.