



SPEECH BY DR. EKWOW SPIO-GARBRAH, CEO OF CTO

The CTO FORUM, 13th September, 2010
Colombo, Sri Lanka,

Your Excellency, The President of the Republic of Sri Lanka
Hon. Ministers of State and Deputies, Hon. Members of Parliament
The Director of the Standardisation Bureau of the ITU,
Our Host Organisation, the Telecom Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka
Distinguished Members of the CTO Council
Delegates to the CTO Forum
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed an honour for the CTO family to be gathered here in the idyllic city of Colombo and amongst the hospitable people of Sri Lanka for another CTO Forum and for the 50th Meeting of the CTO Council. In this Jubilee Year of the CTO Council, it is indeed an occasion for some nostalgia. As some Sri Lankans and some delegates may recall, only 6 years ago, barely a year after I had assumed office as Chief Executive of the CTO, we had the privilege of being hosted by Sri Lanka at the Council Meeting of September 2004. And although there are many other Asian Commonwealth countries that could have hosted this year's Forum and the related Council meetings, it is once again Sri Lanka which has risen up as a Champion of Commonwealth Values, of Commonwealth knowledge-sharing, of Commonwealth ICT development and of Commonwealth brotherhood. We appreciate you, people of Sri Lanka.

Mr. President, we salute you. We salute your personal commitment to the Commonwealth and your personal commitment to South-South collaboration and to North-South partnerships. In 2004, then as Prime Minister of this Republic you elected—in spite of your numerous alternative obligations—to personally attend the CTO Forum of that year, and to demonstrate your support to what the CTO stands for. Today, as a re-elected President of a united Sri Lanka, you have once again chosen, notwithstanding many other places you could be this morning, to be amongst us, to encourage us, to give us faith in what we do, to re-affirm the importance that your country attaches to the role that ICTs can play in the development process, and in the transformation of many Commonwealth countries into Knowledge Economies.

Mr President, this assembly of CTO delegates are here in Colombo to underscore their conviction that no country today can develop rapidly if it does not place great emphasis on using ICTs to accelerate growth and prosperity. Our Forum theme of "Towards a Digital Commonwealth: Broadband Connectivity for All" is most exemplified in the decision taken by your government, under your illustrious leadership, to improve broadband availability, access and affordability by, for example, providing connectivity to the majority of the population through some 5,000 Buddhist temples. By ensuring a high level of literacy in your country—which I understand approaches some 90% of the population—and by enabling this increasingly literate population to be easily connected with the rest of the world, you have set a fine example worthy of emulation by many other developing countries.

Mr. President, this is partly why the CTO is here in Sri Lanka. The CTO exists primarily to act as an ICT knowledge-exchange and best practices platform amongst its member countries and beyond. Through research and studies, consultancy and advisory services, capacity building and training, and through knowledge-sharing events such as this Forum, the CTO has been contributing considerably to



the advancement of its member countries for more than 100 years. In the last two years, our emphasis on rural connectivity initiatives and projects, through for example the Commonwealth African Rural Connectivity Report, and its related COMARCI workshops has enabled several member countries to more fully grasp the potential for ICT growth through Public-Private-People's Partnerships (PPPP), with the emphasis on the last P—the people.

For developing countries, in particular, without the People's passionate involvement and support for governmental initiatives little development is possible. So, we acknowledge the tremendous progress made by the global community in connecting some 4 billion people by mobile technologies in just 20 years. Asia and Africa have been the two regions to benefit the most from the wonders of mobile connectivity. Today, through mobile platforms, the Internet and various e-applications, the poorer segments of this globe, possibly for the first time in human history, stand the same chance as the wealthiest in the Western World in their ability to have access to Knowledge—the oxygen of prosperity. And through a Commonwealth Telecom Development Fund, which the CTO and its partners hope to launch by the end of this year, we at the CTO, with your help, will be able to do even more.

I understand, Mr President, that in the Bhuddist religion, choosing auspicious moments for any action is very important. Just last week, you chose a very auspicious time to successfully seek Constitutional changes from the people of Sri Lanka. Congratulations. Here in this hotel, there have been several weddings here almost each day in the last week. Let me therefore take advantage of this auspicious occasion, Excellency, to invite you to become the Political Champion and the Spiritual God Father of the Commonwealth Telecom Development Fund. I am certain that should you agree to so do, you would have added another major international acclaim to your many other accomplishments.

Yes, Distinguished Delegates, a lot more needs to be done, if we are collectively to use ICTs to provide a more level playing field for global competition amongst nations and communities. From more far-sighted policy-making to more robust regulatory interventions, to keener competition amongst private operators, and to greater consumer protection, we collectively still have a lot to do. But the wisdom of a Common Wealth of ICT knowledge is that no country or entity needs to repeat the mistakes made elsewhere. Each government, each regulator, each ICT operator in the Commonwealth can learn from the best practices in the sector and avoid the mistakes of others. And this is what we hope to achieve at this Forum, and what we urge you all to sustain through strengthening the CTO and its capabilities. And it is this further capacitation of the CTO that I hope delegates to the CTO Council, which meets on Thursday and Friday, will resolve to underscore.

Mr. President, distinguished fellow delegates, we shall have a lot to discuss over the next five days. With the generous hospitality and natural friendliness extended to us by the Government and people of Sri Lanka, we should have a very enriching Forum, and an equally successful Council Meeting, and retain wonderful eternal memories of Sri Lanka. On behalf of the Management of the CTO, I thank the Secretary to the President, the Telecom Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka, the ICT operators and other sponsors, and all those who have worked in many ways to make this week a success. We certainly expect to leave your shores this coming weekend with many pearls of knowledge and wisdom from the beautiful Pearl of Asia.

Thank You