



**South Asia ICT & Digital Content for Development Conference
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**Message from
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United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development**

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address this South Asia Conclave ICT & Digital Content for Development Conference. I would like to congratulate the Digital Empowerment Foundation, the World Summit Award, and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of India, through its Centre for e-Governance, for organizing this event and hosting this gathering of leaders and visionaries on ICT and e-content from the region.

Information and communication technologies offer immense opportunities to nations and communities that adopt them. From health to education, governance to environment, food sustainability to climate change, ICT applications and services can provide solutions to crises, bridge communities, lift people out of poverty, and bring progress and prosperity.

Significant progress is now being made in closing the digital divide. Many of those who were bypassed by the technological revolution are now gaining access and connectivity. Digital dividends - spurred by growth in ICT infrastructure, mobile phones, wireless Internet, and inexpensive computers - have begun to trickle to the world's masses, even in the poorest countries.

Yet the task is not only to provide access to information and communication technologies, but also quality and relevant local content. At the World Summit on the Information Society, world leaders and the ICTD community recognized that "*The creation, dissemination and preservation of content in diverse languages and formats must be accorded high priority in building an inclusive Information Society...*" (Geneva Declaration of Principles).

In today's Information Society, access to quality content is as important as access to ICT and improving infrastructure. Quality content and applications - in the area of education, culture, health, governance and public administration, business and commerce - must flourish to bring to fruition, specially to the world's poor, the real benefits of the information age. Doing so will help contribute to alleviating poverty, to promoting learning and well-being, to empowering communities, and enriching societies. South Asian countries, in particular, stand to gain most from information and communication technologies and content development, thanks to its robust economic growth and the high quality of its workforce.

Development of e-content and ICT applications are at the heart of the work of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development, a multi-stakeholder platform of the United Nations, which advances the use of ICT in the developing world, to help contribute to the achievement of the internationally-agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. By the guidance provided by its Steering Committee, the Global Alliance is now embarking on a two-year work programme, that envisions to promote access, connectivity, education and content, so that their potential can be leveraged for full development impact.

In this work programme, the Global Alliance, through its flagship partnership initiative on *e-Content and Creativity*, under the leadership of the World Summit Award, will contribute to bridging the digital divide and narrowing the global content gap by selecting and promoting local contents and innovative applications and identifying best practices from around the world.

I am heartened to learn that leaders and innovators from the private sector, academia, civil society and media companies are converging here today to bridge the content gap in the South Asian region.

Indeed, we need to harness the collective strength of all stakeholders to contribute to the cause of e-content development. We need a genuine spirit of solidarity and cooperation. I, therefore, would like to invite all of you to join hands with the United Nations and the Global Alliance for ICT and Development, in a partnership, to contribute to the development of rich local e-content and ICT applications and open up a world of opportunity and possibilities for the poor.