



**Joint UNCTAD - UN ESCAP Asia-Pacific Regional Conference
E-commerce Strategies for Development
Bangkok, 20-22 November 2002**

**Summary of the High-level Roundtable
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I wish to now summarize some of the main points that were raised during the Ministerial Roundtable debate.

There are significant differences among the countries of the Asia Pacific as far as ICT and e-commerce is concerned. It is important to have this kind of forum so that countries with experience can help those that are at a very initial stage to formulate their own ICT and e-commerce strategies.

There were some interesting views on infrastructure. For some, increasing telecommunications infrastructure is the most important priority. Others suggest that we should not focus too much on infrastructure. Clearly, where there is no telecommunications or Internet access there is no e-commerce. But technology evolves very quickly and newer, more affordable options are reducing the barriers to universal access.

Liberalisation of the telecommunications has proven to be an important stimulus to increasing investment in telecom infrastructure. UNCTAD can provide further support to the countries of the region by conducting some detailed analyses on the ways and means for liberalising ICT infrastructure.

At the same time we are working to improve infrastructure we should also be working towards changing the business attitudes so that companies, especially the SMEs, understand the elements of e-commerce and the benefits it can bring to them. Eventually the results of these policies will all converge. We have to work on all of these elements and in parallel.

Political will and motivation is important. It is important to have the leadership from the top levels of Government. Government has played a decisive role in those countries of the region that we look up to as success stories. But Government alone is not sufficient. There must be active involvement of business sector. It is important to ensure that government and business engage in dialogue. We need the commitment of our political leaders, but we also need the confidence of our business leaders to engage in e-commerce.

We noted this morning that Thailand has inaugurated the new Ministry of Information and Communications Technology. Viet Nam has established a new Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, with responsibility for ICT. UNESCAP has created a new Information, Communications, and Space Technologies Division. The challenge for institutions and organizations responsible for ICT is to be inclusive, to be willing to work with everyone, to support and coordinate. This is especially true in the area of e-commerce.

Yes, understanding the technology requires expertise, but ICT expertise needs to be integrated with commercial expertise, with transport and logistics experience, with financial and other skills. And inter-ministerial cooperation with one country, inter-divisional cooperation within one organization can be just as difficult as international cooperation among nations - perhaps even more so.

It is also important that the more advanced countries of the region and the relevant international organizations provide assistance to the less developed countries of the regions. There was broad consensus on the importance of increasing efforts on human resource development.

I would like to thank the Ministers, Mr. Sok Suphana, Chairman of the Topical Sessions, Mr. Manoo Ordeedolchest, as Discussant, and all the Delegates who participated in today's High-level roundtable debate. Let us continue in the weeks and months to come to transform this discussion into actions that will make ICT and e-commerce for development not an objective, but a reality.

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