



Kingdom of Cambodia

Address By

Samdech HUN SEN
Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia

To the Opening Ceremony of the Workshop
on Public Awareness about Information Technology

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**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure for me to attend the workshop on *Public Awareness about Information Technology*, which is being held during the next three days. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the National Authority for Information Technology for organizing this seminar, while efforts are being deployed by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) formulate policies and strategies aimed at reducing a digital divide between Cambodia and the region and the rest of the world in order to promote poverty alleviation and sustainable development and to reap appropriate benefits from globalization. I also take this opportunity to sincerely thank Prof. Stephan Hill, UNESCO Representative, and Ms. Dominique MacAdams, UNDP Resident Representative, for their assistance in organizing this seminar to raise public awareness about the benefits of information technology (IT) in our day-to-day life, management and business, as well as the need for the introduction of IT in government business.

This conference on IT Awareness is of great significance, since it is a timely response to the immediate needs and requirements of Cambodia and helps the country to bring about the introduction of IT in all sectors, to join the bandwagon of development and to catch up with the region and the world. To this end, an Authority was established to consider the benefits and implications of IT use and to study and establish appropriate institutional organization to meet Cambodia's current conditions. Its objectives also include human resource training, introduction of international standards and the establishment of a sound legal and regulatory framework. At the same time, I am confident that the papers to be presented by all presenters and the brainstorming on each topic will become a comprehensive database, information and a strong foundation for the development of a vision for the IT development. This will play a key role in building up Cambodia comparative advantages in the world of globalization.

Taking this rare opportunity, may I share with you all my own views, which hopefully could be instrumental in developing the vision of IT development in Cambodia.

If we look beyond the horizon towards a future, we can see that at the dawn of the new millenium the world is moving very fast, fuelled by globalization, towards a new, unfettered IT development. The miraculous development of new high tech and computers has shortened the distance of the world and is giving way to the emergence of a new, digitalized and knowledge-based economy. Information, broadcasting and telecommunications have increasingly become an important factor, which underpins the development of human civilization. Relationships and exchange between communities and countries on arts, culture, politics and scientific achievements are conducted by using the state-of-the-art telecommunications. The radio, national and international TV networks, and the Internet are being recognized as the most efficient communication medium, which speed up the dissemination of information. The use of multi-media technology and IT has become an imperative and a large number of countries have used these technological achievements to facilitate business, commensurably with the pace and the magnitude of market operations.

Therefore, technological revolution has rapidly changed the world. Transactions are being made on-line. Almost all products and services, including banking, consultant and accounting services, can be purchased on line using the Internet. Moreover, the current state of technology allows us to codify knowledge and know-how and transfer them through e-mail, fax or the Internet. Thus, almost all human beings in the world can obtain assets, goods, services and resources almost at the same time from different places. In this context, electronic commerce has emerged as a dynamic, modern form of transactions, which has received adequate attention, especially from the World Trade Organization (WTO). E-commerce has become one of the most important forms of cooperation in ASEAN.

At the ASEAN plus three Summit Meeting held in Singapore, on 28 November 2000, I stated that the world has recognized that in the current of globalization concerted efforts to reduce the digital divide is key to poverty alleviation, improvement in people's well-beings and the strengthening of each nation's comparative advantages in order to promote sustainable development. The development of IT and telecommunications have an important role to play in this process. Then, I welcome and voiced a strong support for Japan's initiative at the G-8 Summit in July 2000 to provide US\$15 billion over the period of five years to assist developing countries in information and telecommunications technology. Moreover, within the ASEAN framework, all members are in the process of implementing ASEAN IT development projects, such as the E-ASEAN project and the projects to build up IT capacity for new members.

This shift in the development paradigm imposes a new development scenario for Cambodia. In the long run, key factors of production will shift from land and natural resources to information, knowledge and innovation embodied in Cambodia's human capital. In other words, knowledge, skills and expertise of the Cambodian people will become increasingly crucial to the country's future economic growth. Extensive economic growth and development will be gradually giving way to intensive economic growth. This type of growth requires more added values from ideas and innovation. Cambodia should not be marginalized from the development of human civilization. Thus, the RGC has endeavored to promote the use of modern technology in Cambodia's e-mail systems to enable the country to respond to the current needs in all sectors, especially to the development of e-commerce.

However, the government's top priority is to use IT to serve and to meet the day-to-day needs of the people. IT should become as an efficient means for the public to exercise their rights to get information related to the decisions made by the government and the conduct of

government business in accordance with the principles of transparency and good governance. In the long run, the introduction of decentralization and deconcentration as part of the government's administrative reform efforts will require the increasing use of IT to link the communes and local communities with Phnom Penh with a view to promoting efficient management and facilitating timely exchange of necessary information. Thus, from the point of view of the political and administrative aspects, IT will help strengthen democracy, ensure transparency, promote good governance in government and community businesses. With regard to the economic and social aspect, IT will improve major public service delivery to the local people and allow them to monitor and receive regularly and timely all kinds of information, especially the necessary information about the markets, which will facilitate their economic decision making.

The experience of many neighboring countries show that human resource development is key to promoting IT developments. IT development should be linked to the increase in labor productivity and the knowledge of the people, the transfer of expertise and technology, diversity and access by the people to health care and education, the development of entrepreneurship and the accumulation of new cultural assets.

To achieve the above objectives, Cambodia needs a long-term IT development strategy, which responds to the realities of the country, the changes and new developments in regional and world economies. This vision should be supported by a detailed action plan for implementation. The common vision for IT development, with all the supporting policies, strategies and multi-discipline measures to be elaborated by the government, as well as concrete actions being undertaken at the national level, should guide Cambodia towards a bright future, strengthen the culture of peace, promote virtues, knowledge and living standards of our people, and more importantly Cambodia's prestige in the international arena.

As the Head of the Government and as a Cambodian, I wish to make a humble contribution to the development of this vision by drawing your attention to the following:

First, the sine qua non conditions for the increased use of IT is the development of telecommunication infrastructures through the policy of liberalization, strengthening the authority responsible for the supervision and regulation and open access to instill fair competition. In this sense, attention has been given by the RGC to formulate policies and establish a legal and regulatory framework for the development of the telecommunication sector. At the same time, the RGC is committed to provide incentives to attract investments in the telecommunications sector. As a result, Cambodia is being recognized as a country with the state-of-the-art telecommunication network, which will pave the way for further development of the sector. Nevertheless, much more remained to be done with our partners to ensure that Cambodia will not be marginalized from the telecommunication and IT revolution.

Second, expanding the coverage for the use of the Internet by considering measures to attract private investments and modern technology, and by ensuring free and fair, market-based competition. This will create necessary conditions for cost reduction, improvement in public services, so that the government, the private sector, the educational and research universities and the Cambodian people in general will be able to use of this instrument as efficient as possible.

Third, Language is an important vehicle to promote development and IT transfer. The use of IT in Khmer language will open access to millions of people who will be able to benefit from these technological developments. Therefore, standardization of Khmer language in computers will improve efficiency and capability of this sector and facilitate communications at all levels. I suggest to the Authority for ICT Development to pay considerable and immediate attention to this problem. Nevertheless, improvement in English language is of critical importance in terms of acquiring and deepening IT knowledge. To become competitive in the future within the context of ASEAN and globalization we should promote English as the second or working language of Cambodia, while Khmer language should always be Cambodia's official language. In general, I support the idea that every Cambodian should know at least four languages (Khmer, English, French and a language of one of the countries of East Asia). In the future, language skills will become an important comparative advantage for Cambodia.

Fourth, computer literacy, as is the case with foreign languages, must be promoted among Cambodians. Computer literacy is currently one of the most important tools that exist for communications, economic management, trade, domestic and international investment, as well as for knowledge accumulation and management expertise. This is true for every country in the world, and Cambodia is no exception to this. The most important direction is to include computer literacy in the curriculum of every secondary school, faculty and university throughout Cambodia.

Fifth, continuous efforts should be given to promote the activities and encourage the participation of the private sector in IT development. This is also related to government's policies to ensure the sound management of foreign direct investment. It should provide sufficient incentives for companies to transfer to Cambodia technical skills and new technology for the country's development while at the same time allowing other companies and individuals to access the ideas that flow from the research.

Sixth, attention should be given to protect intellectual capital and use the Internet for development purposes by preventing the use of such technology for committing crimes or other purposes which are contrary to morality, traditions and good mores of the society.

These are the main elements of our strategy, which should be taken into account while considering the preparation of a long-term vision for IT development in Cambodia. In all these endeavors, human resource and effective and efficient use of these resources are the key to success. I am confident that this conference will provide opportunity for lively discussions on this very important topic and contribute in a concrete and substantial manner to raise public awareness and formulate a vision for IT development in Cambodia.

In concluding, I would like to extend to you all, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, as well as all participants, a success and prosperity in all your endeavors.

I would like to declare that the "workshop on *Public Awareness about Information Technology*" open.

Thank you.