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Second Committee General Discussion on “Information and Communication
Technologies for Development” [Agenda Item 17]**

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Statement by:

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United Nations**

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Algeria on behalf of the G-77 & China.

Mr. Chairman,

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has grown tremendously and has contributed to the exponential growth in a range of sectors such as business, governance, education, health, disaster risk reduction and many others. Undoubtedly, the use of telecommunication and broadband technologies has accelerated socio-economic growth in many developing countries. World leaders at the historic Rio+20 Conference also recognized ICT as a key facilitator in the flow of information. The Rio+20 Outcome Document acknowledges the need for enhanced international cooperation to bridge the digital divide through improved access to technology. That document also recognizes that younger generations, as the custodians of the future, need ICT in their education to prepare them for modern careers.

Sri Lanka welcomes the UN Secretary-General's report on the progress on implementation and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) at the regional and international levels. The adoption of two ECOSOC resolutions during its substantive session last July strengthens our collective efforts to achieve internationally-agreed development goals with enhanced management of resources.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wishes to highlight some salient features of Sri Lanka's ICT strategy that enhanced socio-economic development. Since 2005, the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA) has provided leadership in the application of ICT. Its "*e-Sri Lanka*" programme has achieved major economic, developmental and social improvements. A range of ICT facilities have been also introduced to strengthen information management in governance, education, healthcare, industrial, agriculture, fisheries, social security and judicial systems, especially at the grassroots level.

The rural telecenter network, or the "Nenasala" Centers ("Wisdom outlets" programme), was a special innovation. It promotes partnerships among the government, private corporations, individual entrepreneurs and civil society organizations to create a knowledge society. The Ministry of Technology & Research also operates another island-wide network named "Vidatha." These multi service centers promote access to scientific and technological applications, including ICT, to rural communities. With the patronage of the government, young men and women have initiated ICT and internet societies to develop content in local languages, which is essential for accommodating rural communities. They have also actively engaged the global telecenter community for the past seven years. We have also inaugurated an annual competition to recognize innovative and outstanding contributors for content development.

In 2010, the Government set up a separate Ministry for Information & Communication Technology to strengthen the leadership, advance the sector and collaborate with other stakeholders. Our national broadband policy plans to narrow the digital divide by implementing an island-wide national backbone network that provides low cost and high-speed connectivity through competition among service providers.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wishes to commend the annual United Nations Public Service Awards programme that encourages innovative and effective e-Government applications worldwide. Sri Lanka's e-Government policy has ignited a rapid e-service drive, serving a significant portion of the country's population and interconnecting a large number of public institutions. The Government's administrative reforms programme has recognized e-Government as key to the public sector reforms agenda, due to its citizen-centric approach to service delivery and diversification of public

services. Citizens can now access many e-Government and e-business services including service delivery information, online payment facilities, and digitized archives of citizens' documentation.

As a result of the investments, the ICT literacy rate in Sri Lanka has grown from approximately 5% in 2004 to almost 40% in 2012. The target is 75% by 2015. Sri Lanka's Network Readiness Index ranking has improved significantly. Cellular phone penetration stands at over 100% and broadband technologies are increasingly available in rural areas.

Mr. Chairman,

Bridging the digital divide between rural and urban communities can help curb unwanted migration patterns in certain countries. As public services become available to citizens electronically, time consuming and costly visits to urban centers, in order to access many services, become unnecessary. ICT is a powerful source of distance education and promotes innovative employment creation. Increasing ICT literacy will encourage youth to access e-learning platforms and ICT based "green" jobs. Many small-scale rural BPOs are already emerging. Our first women BPO started on this year's International Women's Day in Jaffna. This city suffered severely during the 30-year internal conflict.

ICT is a catalyst for development and is itself a growth sector, representing the fifth largest revenue generating industry of Sri Lanka, surpassing the traditional sectors. The SLASSCOM—the national chamber of the private sector entities engaged in ICT-based Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry—plans to make it the largest source of our economy by 2015.

My delegation stresses the importance of maximizing the efficiency of existing platforms through collective efforts before introducing new standards for international internet governance. The collective efforts of the scientific, academic, and business communities and civil society organizations are necessary to upgrade global ICT systems as demand increases. Significantly, Sri Lanka has qualified to meet the latest standards of internet governance. In order to further enhance our development potential through ICTs, Sri Lanka has taken the initiative to adopt globally compatible legislative measures covering a wide array of areas such as Intellectual Property Rights, Electronic Transactions, Electronic Payment and Settlement Systems and Computer Crime.

The Statutes passed by our Parliament in these areas are often used as best practice case studies in global fora.

Sri Lanka has learned a lot from the many success stories of other Member States and we are also ready to share the lessons learnt from our efforts to make ICT a tool for development. There is further room for development, but significant advances have already been made in Sri Lanka despite our limited resources. Sri Lanka chaired the ICT Committee of the UN-ESCAP in two successive years in 2008 and 2009 and was elected again in September 2012. All these efforts contribute to the vision of the President of Sri Lanka to make it a knowledge hub in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

ICT should not divide Member States and communities. Efforts should be deployed to interconnect all communities regardless of the level of development to ensure the well-being of all citizens. ICT must be made readily available to developing countries in their efforts to modernize and revitalize their economies and to realize their developmental goals.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.