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Bridging The Digital Divide

Access, Adoption, Value

Economic Planning Unit

in partnership with

United Nations Development Programme

Speech by:

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Yang Berusaha Puan Noriyah Ahmad, Deputy Director General (Macro), Economic Planning Unit

Yang Berusaha Mr. K. Yogeessaran, Director of the Evaluation Unit, Economic Planning Unit

Dr. Roger Harris, Roger Harris Associates, International Consultant on the BDD Project

Distinguished Guests and dialogue participants

Selamat pagi dan salam sejahtera kepada semua para hadirin sekalian.

Let me begin by thanking Yang Berusaha Puan Noriyah Ahmad, Deputy Director General (Macro), Economic Planning Unit (EPU), for her commitment in attending the policy dialogue today despite of her busy schedule.

Distinguished guests,

The role of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in advancing development and empowering the poor and disadvantaged is increasingly being recognized. ICT is shrinking the world in both time and space and nobody can afford to be left behind.

UNDP Malaysia is proud to work in partnership with EPU through a study on "A National Strategic Framework For Bridging The Digital Divide". The study's purpose is to prepare a comprehensive national framework for bridging the digital divide here in Malaysia.

The study covers the assessment of the current state of the digital divide; reviews current policies and strategies for bridging the digital divide (BDD); analyses the impact of existing BDD programmes and projects on target groups; establishes benchmarks based on international best practices; and finally proposes a comprehensive national framework for BDD.

This partnership contributes to the achievement of our work in the United Nations towards an open and prosperous information society through the use of ICT as a tool for advancing development. ICT has increasingly become an indispensable tool for virtually every development area, including trade, health, SME development, community development and education.

ICT has an especially important role to play in reducing poverty. It is a powerful economic, social and political tool for empowering the poor, especially women. And children growing up without the benefits of ICT will inevitably fall behind their counterparts who do have access. ICT is indispensable for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially the eradication of poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Malaysia has made considerable advances to bridge the digital divide. A very large percentage of the population now has access to a mobile phones, radio, TV and video players. The government has also initiated many promising e-pilot projects to ensure people in remote areas have access to computers. However, we are also acutely aware that there are

underserved sections of society in Malaysia, especially in rural areas of Sabah and Terengganu where poverty and hardcore poverty rates are highest.

There is much potential for Malaysia's SMEs to make greater use of ICT. There is often a lack of appreciation of the potential of e-commerce, and there are concerns about the high perceived start up costs of ICT infrastructure. Perhaps what is needed is an intensive education campaign on the benefits of e-commerce and how it opens up markets and business prospects.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Evaluation Section in EPU, under the able leadership of Mr. Yogees for its close cooperation and partnership with UNDP in arranging this policy dialogue, and our distinguish panel of speakers for helping bring it together. I am confident that the dialogue outcome will provide the necessary momentum for strengthening Malaysia's current ICT policies for development.

Thank you.