

Inaugural speech by Mr. Sushil Kumar Ojha ,  
Joint Secretary, MoIC

“National Workshop on Making Telecommunications  
and ICTs accessible for persons with disabilities.”

Hotel Yak and Yeti, Kathmandu, 09 November 2012

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My colleagues from different ministries of the Government of Nepal, NTA  
and the telecom operators, friends from other stakeholder organizations,  
invitees, friends from the media, ladies and gentlemen!

I thank the organizer for giving me this opportunity to inaugurate this very  
important event and deliver my inaugural address. I extend my sincere  
appreciation to NTA and the ITU for carrying out this project. Some of us  
are not fortunate for some reasons or the others. One billion out of seven  
billion of us living in this world are living with some form of disability  
which might have been congenital for some of us, some of us might have  
acquired this disability due to health related problems and still others due to  
some accidents or some other reasons.

Of course the primary responsibility lies with every government that it should  
take care of its citizens with disability and ensure that they enjoy the same  
rights as other fellow human beings and provide all possible assistance to

make their life normal and mainstream them into a productive career. It is also equally important to realize that all of us as individuals too have equal responsibility to extend our support and cooperation wherever we can to our fellow beings having some form of disability. This is a responsibility that comes to us because we are human beings. Private or other organizations have responsibilities towards them in the form of CSR( Corporate Social Responsibility). Having realized these collective responsibilities not only in the sectoral or national level but also in the international level, we have come together for this stakeholders workshop this fine morning today. This is why this joint initiative of NTA and the ITU is commendable.

I bring to your kind notice that the Government of Nepal is a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ( UNCRPD) and has already ratified it.

The world statistics on disability is alarming and disheartening at the same time-1) Over a billion of the world's population lives with some form of disability,2) 20 % of the world's poorest people are disabled and are understood to be the most disadvantaged sections of the society,3) Persons with disabilities are often unemployed or underemployed,4) The global literacy rate for persons with disability was reported at approximately 3% in 1998 by UNDP

With technologies and suitably framed and adjusted policy, legislative and regulatory framework, the situation can be changed. The intervention of the telecommunications and ICTs could prove to be a boon for persons with disability.

The world has recognized the significance and potential of telecommunications and ICTs for the inclusion, empowerment and mainstreaming of persons with disabilities and other underprivileged and underserved groups including elderly and illiterate and so do we.

I am not going to talk much about what technologies are already available and can be customized to suit our own circumstances as they are going to be presented by the experts in the next sessions.

I understand that

1 ) lack of clear legislation that can guarantee accessibility to Telecommunications and ICT services

2) lack of initiatives on the part of manufacturers and service providers to provide accessible Telecommunications and ICT products and services and

3) prohibitive cost of accessible Telecommunications and ICT products and services

are becoming barriers for accessing Telecommunications and ICT products and services for persons with disabilities.

On behalf of the Government of Nepal, I express my full commitment that the first barrier posed by legislation will be resolved after getting suitable recommendations and advices from the ITU and NTA. Since this is a multi-stakeholder workshop I urge the stakeholders present here to be generous enough to remove the second and the third barriers to access. Since it may not be possible to remove the second and the third barriers from the side of the service providers alone- as we are promoting a liberalization policy in the telecommunications and ICT products and services- market forces may not work in a sustainable manner- we may opt for a Public private partnership (PPP) model for ensuring access to persons with disabilities. We may have to develop a different business model altogether. Again this provision can be made possible after getting clear recommendation and advice from ITU and NTA.

I am very much optimistic that with collective initiatives and interventions at policy, legal, regulatory and operational level, making coordinated, harmonious, integrated and holistic effort thereby bringing required synergy

and symbiosis, accessibility to the telecommunications and ICT products and services for persons with disability can be ensured.

On behalf of the government I reiterate my commitment as explicitly expressed in the UNCRPD, our constitution and other policies and legislations.

I wish great success for the workshop and for meaningful deliberations .I thank you all for your presence