

Your Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq bin Taimur Al Said, our chief guest

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton, our main speaker

Your Highnesses Your Excellences,

Distinguished guests,

I am delighted to welcome you all to this wonderful evening as we gather here to celebrate the announcement of the Sultan Qaboos Awards for Excellence in eGovernment for the second consecutive year. The creation of the Award comes as confirmation of the eminent vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said – God bless him and protect him – to benefit from the latest breakthroughs in science and technology with a view to promoting comprehensive development across the Sultanate. Among these areas of knowledge, information and communication technology has become the backbone of the twenty first century and the cornerstone of development for various aspects of human activity.

Distinguished guests,

The Sultanate has developed a national strategy for building Oman's Digital Society and eGovernment. Such a strategy has included the implementation of numerous inter-connected and integrated projects such as the Oman Government Network, the National Data Centre, the Centre for Information Security (CIS), Oman's National CERT and the ePayment Gateway. Moreover, the Official eGovernment Services Portal was launched to serve as the main access to information and services. These projects went hand in hand with the promulgation of legislation and laws regulating e-transactions in the Sultanate.

The Sultanate has given its undivided attention to the development and building of Omani nationals' abilities and skills in the area of IT. Through the implementation of the Government IT Training & Certification (GITTC) program, more than 45,000 government officials thus far have been trained. Another project offering specialized training programs to civil servants is also being implemented, with a view to qualifying and encouraging nationals to come up with new digital innovations. Additional programs which aim to train and spread awareness among nationals are being conducted as well through the Community Knowledge Centers (CKC's) set up across the Sultanate. To date, approximately 24,000 Omani nationals have benefited from these programs.

From His Majesty's belief in the importance of enabling all segments of the society to avail themselves of eGovernment services and information available online, His Majesty issued royal directives to grant laptops to each beneficiary family of the social insurance who has at least one child enrolled in public school, and to grant laptops to higher education students of those families.

As of the end of September this year, around 40,000 laptops, along with the provision of free Internet services for a period of one year have been distributed. In addition, free training in computer skills has been provided to these families to enable them to use their own laptops. We will also start during this month of December the second phase of laptop distribution, in which we look forward to engaging all segments of society in the digital transformation witnessed by the Sultanate in various domains. A big part of the cost of laptop distributed to higher education students in their first year and to the teachers who graduate from the Government IT Training & Certification program has been also assumed by the Government. Thus, the number of National PC Initiative beneficiaries will be more than 113,000 with a cost exceeding 20 million Omani Rials.

Distinguished guests,

During the first round of the Award that took place last year seven eGovernment projects won the Award. In an attempt to constantly develop the Award, two new domains were added this year under the Best eService category: Best eService from Government to Employees and Mobile Services. Moreover, this year, in acknowledgment of the excellent performance of eProjects in various fields, the category of Best eProject has included the Award for Best eProject carried out by one single government institution (Individual) and the Award for Best eProject jointly carried out by more than one institution (Collaborative).

Distinguished guests,

The Jury Panel for this year's Award was formed by eleven members chaired by a renowned international expert with the membership of two professionals from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) in addition to experts from the United States of America, United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Italy, Slovakia and India. These experts were nominated to guarantee unbiased selection of the winning projects. For many days the Jury Panel evaluated the participating projects in accordance with the criteria approved for excellence in each of the Award categories.

This Award has had a huge positive impact on creating competitiveness among the participants looking forward to winning such a significant Award. This in turn has positively contributed to the development and enhancement of eServices helping the Sultanate make many achievements in this field. At the international level, the Sultanate has won three first-place United Nations Public Service Awards. Oman's Educational Portal of the Ministry of Education won first place in the 'Improving the delivery of public services' category. The Ministry of Civil Service's Central Recruiting System won first place in the 'Preventing and combating corruption in the public service' category. The Information Technology Authority also won first place through its 'Transforming the Society through the e.oman Communication Strategy' in the 'Advancing knowledge management in government' category. The National Association

for Cancer Awareness was a second place winner, for its 'Mobile Mammography Unit' in the 'Promoting gender-responsive delivery of public services' category. At the regional level, the Sultanate was presented this past November with the largest share of awards at the 2nd GCC eGovernment Awards. Three Omani eProjects won first place in three of the Award's categories. Additionally, two Omani projects won two honorary prizes for the Best Projects participating in the GCC eGovernment Award competition.

Furthermore, this year, the World Economic Forum report on global competitiveness in the ICT sector affirmed the progress made by the Sultanate. Oman has witnessed great improvement in results compared to previous years, having been ranked in the 41st position in the Networked Readiness Index (NRI), among 138 countries. Globally, it was ranked 13th in the area of Government Readiness; 19th in the area of Government success in ICT promotion; and 10th when it comes to the importance of ICT to Government vision.

Distinguished guests,

I would like to congratulate all the winning projects this year and to extend my thanks and gratitude to all the organizations which have participated in the Award and their employees for their tremendous efforts and kind co-operation. We hope that more excellent projects will be participating next year.

I am pleased to extend our upmost gratitude to the Honorable William Jefferson Clinton for accepting our invitation.

I would like to thank His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq Al Said, the Patron of this event and to thank our distinguished guests who accepted our invitation. We are also grateful to the Jury Panel and to all those who worked in this award and those who have helped in preparing for this ceremony.

Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton, the 42nd President of the United States.

President (Bill) Clinton has a long history of promoting the Internet and digital technology to develop government services. It was during the Clinton Administration that the first government portal in the US was created in the year 2000, called Firstgov.gov, which was designed to expedite delivery of information to citizens of the United States.

After leaving the White House in 2001, President (Bill) Clinton he knew he wanted to spend his life as a private citizen working in the areas he cared about most and where he could make a measurable difference. His vision: a nongovernmental organization that could leverage the unique capacities of governments, partner organizations, and other individuals to address rising inequalities and deliver tangible results that improve people's lives. This vision was the first step towards establishing the William J. Clinton Foundation. Because of this work world leaders have made 1,950 Commitments to Action to improve more than 300 million lives around the world.

Please join me to welcome the honorable Bill Clinton.