

**Your Excellencies Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, Minister of Commerce and Industry.**

**Your Highnesses,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,**

After Compliments,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to today's event to inaugurate Digital Oman Awareness and promotion Campaign.

Nowadays, the important role played by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in speeding up and sustaining the development of nations as well as in bridging the digital divide is globally recognized.

The futuristic “Oman ۲۰۲۰” economic development vision aims at expanding and diversifying the Omani economy and enabling it to participate in the global economy. Accordingly, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Government has paid special attention to ICT as an enabler of its development strategy aimed at devising and adopting modern high value production methodologies and tools thus realizing the purposes and goals of sustainable and comprehensive growth.

Our development strategy rests on a vision mandating and expanding the adoption of ICT and scientific progress in availing automated and electronic access to services and information for the Omani society wherever and whenever possible. Therefore, we have formulated our Digital Society strategy utilizing a comprehensive, unified, and integrated methodology aimed at building Digital Oman and availing government service electronically to citizens and businesses.

As part of our continuous efforts aimed at laying a solid foundation for an Omani knowledge based economy, the Seventh Five Year

Plan (٢٠٠٦/٢٠١٠) has put strong emphasis on developing the Omani ICT sector through a phased implementation of the Digital Oman Strategy and focusing on building the foundation for electronic service delivery while allocating special priority to development and research work.

Accordingly, and in order to establish the foundation IT infrastructure, the Government has contracted Oman Telecommunications Company (OmanTel) to implement a convergent Government network through a number of phases, already started with a successful implementation of a pilot project to link ٤ ministries. We are currently preparing to rollout the remaining network implementation phases and its associated security infrastructure with an ultimate goal of linking all government organizations and units.

Also we are currently evaluating proposals for implementing “Ubar Portal”, the Government electronic services gateway. By the end of this year, Ubar Portal initial phases will be implemented including the implementation of the electronic payments gateway, electronic government application forms, and some application integration components of the e-Government infrastructure. This will open up a window for acquiring government services online.

Along the same path, the Government has embarked on implementing a number of projects such as the National Registry System, the Smart ID cards for citizens and residents, The One-Stop-Shop for businessmen and the enhanced Commercial Registration system, and the Banks Network (BankNet) for Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) including Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) and Automated Clearing systems. Coordination is currently underway with a number of Government organizations to implement, integrate, and link other projects to the e-Government infrastructure within the current Five Year Plan.

Realizing the importance of establishing relevant e-Legislation governing and organizing electronic transactions and its role in supporting the broader Digital Oman and e-Government initiatives, a new e-Transactions law has been drafted and is currently being reviewed by relevant authorities in preparation for issuing the new law before the end of this year.

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The success of the Digital Oman Initiative depends on how well the Omani Society is being prepared and empowered to transition to a Digital Society and on the successful implementation of the IT Infrastructure and the National Strategy projects. Prompted by this conviction, a number of skills development and training programs, spanning all sectors of the Omani society, have been planned in cooperation with ministries and government organizations as well as through partnerships with the private sector to benefit from training programs and systems offered by global companies such as “Microsoft”, “Cisco”, Oracle”, “IBM”, and others.

Inline with this direction, the Information Technology Technical Secretariat (ITTS) has started conducting a number of seminars and workshops on a monthly basis aimed at introducing the ITTS developed e-Government IT Governance Framework, its associated IT standards, and implementation policies to government IT staff and personnel concerned with providing electronic services.

Also an agreement was concluded with the Ministry of Civil Service to conduct a series of training programs (such as the International Computer Driving License – ICDL – and the Internet and Computing Core Certification – ICC) for civil servants to develop their core IT skills and prepare them for active participation in delivering Government services electronically. These are scheduled to start as of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006.

I would also like to point to the agreement between the Ministry of Education and ITTS whereby His Excellency The Minister of Education has kindly approved the utilization of government schools computer laboratories after working hours in all the regions, Willayat, and cities, to conduct training and awareness programs for all Omani society sectors.

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We are gathered today to launch the Digital Oman Awareness and Promotion Campaign in the Sultanate which stipulates conducting a series of awareness seminars and the utilization of all media to spread out the understanding of the Digital Oman Society concept and to highlight the importance of the active participation of all society sectors in the movement towards a knowledge based economy. We are also keen on promoting our efforts regionally and globally with an aim of attracting foreign investments to Oman in the ICT arena.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency the Chairman of the National IT Committee (IITC) and Their Excellencies the members and all Their Excellencies the members of the Information Technology Executive Committee (ITEC) on their continuous support for Digital Oman initiatives. Also I would like to praise all ITTS staff on their distinguished efforts wishing them all the success.

Also I would like to thank His Excellency Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, Minister of Commerce and Industry, all Their Highnesses, Their Excellencies, Dignitaries and all our distinguished guests for sharing this momentous occasion with us.