



**Speech of
HE The Under Secretary for Development Affairs
Ministry of National Economy
Deputy Chairman Information Technology Executive
Committee**

**At
The Regional Information and Communication Technology
(ICT) Project Forum
Making Connections in the Middle East and North Africa
May 14-16, 2006**

**Organized by
The US Trade and Development Agency in collaboration with
Information Technology Technical Secretariat (ITTS)**

**Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,**

After Compliments,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you and all the participants in this regional Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Project Forum hosted by the Sultanate, and to congratulate the US Trade and Development Agency on their efforts in organizing this forum "**Making Connections in the Middle East and North Africa**".

This large participation from Middle East and North Africa countries is a proof on how everyone today realizes growing importance of the role of Information Communications Technology (ICT) as an enabler and as a tool in speeding the development of nations and sustaining it as well as in closing the digital divide. The comparative advantages that developing countries have achieved in the last decades compared to the same in underdeveloped countries are due to their capitalization and usage of knowledge.

Since the Information and Communication revolution and the globalization, knowledge has become an important enabler and tool for production, whereas the wealth of countries is measured on the development of ICT and to what extent this is used in the socio economical aspects and not on its natural resources.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Government since its first day of the renaissance in 1970 has paid special attention to the development of the communication sector, which has resulted in substantial development in that sector in volume, type and geographical spread. Whereas the importance of ICT sector has increased tremendously with and was based on Oman development strategy according to the futuristic vision of the Omani Economy (1996 – 2020) which try to achieve economic diversification to consolidate and expand our economy to be part of the global village, by adopting new style of

methodologies and modern production techniques that will have a high added value that will contribute in the achievement of an overall sustainable development process of Oman.

Oman has based its strategy on a vision that spread the range of utilization of ICT and scientific research in providing collaborative services to public and private sectors and citizens through electronic means at a low cost as being the driving force to move forward the Sultanate to the Knowledge Based Economy and achieve sustainable development. In this context the strategy has been prepared according to a unique collaborative and integrated methodology with the objective to build the Digital Oman society and provide e-government services to all the Omani society sectors with clear definition of policies for a healthy environment to encourage IT industry in Oman and its export, in addition to the development of Communication sector according to international universal standards and the restructuring of the telecom sector which enables the active participation of private sector and enable free competition.

And in our continuous effort to lay the solid foundation of the Omani Economy, the general features of our Seventh Five Year Plan (2006/2010) has put more emphasis on the development of the Omani ICT sector through the phased implementation of the national Strategy of Digital Oman and focused on building the Electronic Services with special emphasis to Development and Research work.

In line the Government started implementing its National Digital Oman and E-Government strategy as of May 2003, where number of projects such as the Government Convergent network which will be launched this month and the agreement will be signed with Oman telecommunication company (Omantel). Realizing the importance of E-Legislation and its role in supporting the broader Digital Oman and E-Government initiatives, the Omani Government enacted a new E-Transaction law that is being under review by the relevant authorities to issue the new law before the end of this year. Phase one of the Banks Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) Network including the Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) has been launched and at the moment the second phase which is related to the Automatic Clearing house (ACH) is under its way.

As for the E-Government services there is lot of coordination activities going on at the moment between the Information Technology Technical Secretariat (ITTS) and all government entities in respect to linking and integrating the individual Informatics with the E-Government infrastructure, the National Registry System and the Smart card for citizens and residents was launched,

The One-Stop-Shop for Company's registration is being implemented in collaboration with Ministry of Commerce and Industry which involves six ministries and its first phase will be launched by the end of this month, also the National Statistics Online will be completed by the second quarter of this year.

Realizing the importance of the education sector we have started from the academic year 2004/2005 the successful implementation of the International Computer Driving License – ICDL across 500 schools to train 50,000 students in grade 11 and its expected to complete all the high school students within the coming two years. Also we have completed the infrastructure of government schools where 400 schools have been connected via a wireless network to provide internet access. And in line with that initiative we have jointly started with Ministry of Education and number of government education entities the implementation of the Education Portal which we expect to complete its first phase in the first quarter of next year.

The success of the Digital Oman initiatives depends on how well the Omani Society is being rehabilitated to move on to the Digital Society we have launched on the 15th of April 2006, the Digital Oman Awareness and promotion Campaign inside Oman which includes conducting a series of awareness seminars also the utilization of all the media to spread out the concept of the Digital Oman Society and to highlight the importance of the active participation of all sectors in the movement towards the knowledge based economy and will include the utilization of the computer laboratories in all governments schools in all the regions, willayat and cities to conduct training and awareness programs for all the sectors of the Omani Society after working hours.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

This forum opens doors for tremendous cooperation between participating countries and we anticipate through our participation in the organization of such forum to achieve the following benefits:

- 1- Development of the communication sector to provide the service at an affordable cost and in the reach of all which will have a positive impact on the delivery of e-government services across the country
- 2- Exchange of views and sharing of effective practices in areas such as e-services, knowledge societies and legislations
- 3- Encouraging IT industry as part of Oman economic diversification

- 4- Building the necessary infrastructure for providing e-government services as well as e-commerce will contribute in the achievement of an overall sustainable development process of Oman
- 5- Exchange of views and sharing of effective practices in areas of IT standards

**Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,**

Oman has put lot of emphasis on the successful implementation of ICT and we rely that your forum which includes distinguished guests from different Middle East and North African countries to come to some practical resolutions through the exchange and sharing of views and experience leading to the overall sustainable development of the countries in our area.

Finally I thank you all for your active participation wishing you all the success in your endeavours and to our distinguished guest a pleasant stay in Oman.