

Special remarks at UNESCAP's 80th Session

VIDEO MESSAGE BY TONY BLAIR

Hello everyone. Excellencies Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, distinguished delegates.

I'm sorry not to be with you today in person but I wanted to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the work that UNESCAP is doing in leveraging digital technologies to drive sustainable development in the Asia Pacific.

I'm pleased that my institute was able to contribute to the important study by the UNESCAP Executive Secretary demonstrating just how important digital innovations are to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals.

All around the world today, artificial intelligence is adding a whole new dimension to an existing technological revolution.

And all over the world, companies in the private sector are working out how they improve productivity, change processes, increase efficiency, drive down costs by the application of this technology revolution.

In the judgement of my institute and myself, governments have now got to do the same. Not just encouraging it to happen in the private sector, but doing it themselves as governments, because all the evidence points to the fact that if governments take these decisions to drive through the application of technology in the processes of government, they can transform the service that they provide to citizens and also the cost-benefit analysis of government spending.

So it's a huge revolution with enormous implications. It's going to change everything and it should change government and the way government interacts with the citizen and not just the private sector.

So across Asia Pacific, we've seen a strong growth in and appetite for this technological advancement. For example, my Institute is supporting Indonesian leaders to realise their vision of achieving high income status by 2045 through attracting high-value investments, driving healthcare reform and defining the national agenda on digital and industrialisation. In Vietnam, we're advising ministries and how to attract higher-quality foreign investments, enhance diplomatic capacities and advance the government's high-tech manufacturing goals. And then our work in India focuses on innovative sectors, refining the economic strategy, with the aim, for example, to elevate Odisha from a middle-income to high-income state within the next two decades.

These are just examples of the progress that is being made but we're only at the very beginning of this revolution. And as the world undergoes the consequences of the revolution, the most important thing is that government knows how to harness the opportunities that it presents and mitigate the risks.

So this forum provides an excellent platform to come together to celebrate the achievements, to discuss the emerging challenges, and most of all to develop lasting policy solutions that deliver for the citizen. This will also strengthen region-wide cooperation on digital innovation for the accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

So it all links together. We have these big challenges on climate and sustainable development. We've got big challenges on economic and social regeneration. And we've got technology with the opportunity for government to transform progress in all of these areas.

So this is our challenge. This is what we're all trying to do, and I wish you all a successful and productive meeting. There's no more important subject right now, and I look forward to hearing and debating the conclusions of this immensely important forum.

Thank you.