Respected Chair,

Distinguished Members, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Good Morning!

It is indeed a great pleasure and privilege to address this prestigious forum and share Pakistan's perspective on the important subject of

"Leveraging Digital Innovation for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific."

Ladies & Gentlemen!

Pakistan's digital landscape has witnessed significant growth in recent years.

The expansion of mobile and internet infrastructure has improved internet accessibility and reliability in urban as well as underserved areas.

The rise of mobile internet, driven by affordable smartphones (manufactured with in Pakistan), has helped bridge the digital divide and brought the benefits of the internet to previously underserved communities.

The growth of the internet in Pakistan has fueled the development of a flourishing e-commerce industry and a vibrant digital economy.

Online marketplaces such as Daraz and Alibaba are providing platform for businesses, in particular SMEs to reach out to a wider customer base and conduct transactions online.

In terms of financial inclusion, Pakistani mobile-wallet providers, such as Jazzcash and Easypaisa are being used for multitude of online money transfers, including government payments of pensions, and social welfare payments.

Ladies & Gentlemen!

With continued growth and greater access to digital services, Pakistan has made deliberate efforts in exploiting digital technology and innovations towards achieving the sustainable development goals.

Pakistan's National Digital Transformation Initiative encourages a more consistent approach to the use of digital technologies for Good Governance.

The UK-Pakistan Science and Innovation Global Network (UPSIGN) was established in 2017 to address social and economic challenges, including providing solutions for clean water, energy, agriculture, health, and education.

UPSIGN' has been studying how the availability of energy and clean water in remote communities affect education, gender equality, and poverty.

They are exploring solutions to provide energy to off-grid communities via affordable battery and other energy-storage systems.

Under Pakistan's new Digital Policy, avenues for international collaboration are being explored to promote research and innovation on all the SDGs.

This includes the development of infrastructure promoted by National Incubation Centres targeting SDGs 9 ('Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure') and 11 ('Sustainable Cities and Communities').

It will also support human resources and entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to SDGs 5 ('Gender Equality'), 8 ('Decent Work and Economic Growth'), 1 ('No Poverty') and 4 ('Quality Education').

The Smart Villages initiative in Pakistan is another example of using digital innovation for sustainable development.

This initiative, supported by the Federal Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT), with Huawei, ITU, Universal Service Fund (USF Pakistan), social enterprise TeleTaleem, and one-stop telemedicine

provider Sehat Kahani, aims to connect remote communities, improve access to government services, and promote financial inclusion.

The initiative has been successful in providing e-learning opportunities improving access to healthcare services in remote communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Notwithstanding the efforts of the government, challenges remain, particularly in rural areas where we confront issues, such as internet penetration, affordability, awareness, infrastructure and cultural barriers.

The Government of Pakistan has taken significant steps to address digital inclusion in the country. These steps include:

i. Reduction of taxes on mobile phones and digital devices to make them more affordable and accessible to low-income communities;

ii. Use of digital financial services in government payments, such as salaries, pensions, and social welfare payments;

iii. Digital literacy programs;

iv. Digital inclusion for female entrepreneurs, SMEs and other sectors;

v. Improving internet infrastructure;

vi. Initiating programs like "ICT for Girls" across the country;

Ladies & Gentlemen!

We believe that these measures will not only help in promoting digital inclusion but also contribute towards achieving the sustainable development goals in Pakistan.

In addition, international cooperation and experience sharing plays an important role in individual member states endeavors towards digital inclusion and leveraging innovative technology for achieving sustainable development goals.

We are collaborating with various countries as well as organizations to complement our efforts in this undertaking.

I would like take this opportunity to extend our sincere appreciation and gratitude to our partners for their continued support and cooperation.

We undertake to work diligently to scale up our efforts in addressing issues in the way of digital inclusion, in particular for marginalized segments of the society and underserved regions and use of digital technology to help realize the sustainable development goals.

Thank you all for your time and patient hearing.

Wishing you all a wonderful day ahead!

Thank You!