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[566 words, approx. 4.5 minutes]
(130 words per minute)

Hello, I am glad to join you today – and it is quite apt that I do so via video message.

This meeting, with several other people joining us virtually, is being played live on YouTube.

All of which goes to show how digitisation has changed the way we all work, live and interact.

But we know that progress has been uneven – almost a third of the world's people still do not have access to the Internet, including 65 per cent of homes in the least developed countries.

Lack of skills and poor infrastructure are additional barriers.

And digital exclusion only widens existing inequalities, including the gender gap, with women 20 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile device.

So we must bridge this deep digital divide and harness these revolutionary technologies for the good of all the world's people.

Because there is no doubt that digital transformation has a huge part to play in supporting free, open and prosperous societies.

That of course includes Asia and the Pacific – a powerhouse of a region when it comes to global growth and progress on development.

The opportunity here is immense – to power our economies, and pioneer ground-breaking solutions to problems like climate change and pandemics.

And on an individual level, to transform lives, through innovations like mobile money and fin-tech, which have given millions of people access to banking for the first time.

Then there's the online teaching resources that have transformed learning for young people in remote areas. Giving them the opportunities they deserve to succeed.

And of course telemedicine – bringing doctors to those who cannot reach them in person and saving many lives.

So for all these reasons, and many more besides, the UK recently launched our Digital Development Strategy.

It sets out how we will collaborate with others, including many of you here today, to ensure the digital transformation is inclusive, responsible and sustainable.

We very much look forward to our talks with you this week, exchanging lessons and best practices, and figuring out how best we can work together.

And we are keen to develop further partnerships with UNESCAP Member and Associate Member States – because we are stronger together, sharing all the experience and expertise we can bring to the table.

Just look at the UK's Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN, which is helping to improve internet access for marginalised groups, build regional cyber security centres and promote the safe use of Artificial Intelligence for development.

Together, we are also building stronger business to business links – recognising the private sector as the engine for development.

And we are supporting efforts to double the region's digital economy, driving growth and prosperity for all. This year, we are glad to support Laos, as ASEAN chair, to advance work on the digital agenda - as part of their wider focus on enhancing ASEAN's connectivity and resilience.

Then there is our work with the World Bank across the region – for example, helping to connect the software and IT companies in Nepal through a national association, which in turn can plug into the wider global digital and IT industry.

These are just a few short examples – in the few minutes I have. And this is just the start.

So, as we embrace this new digital world, and all the opportunities it brings for freedom, security and prosperity – let's make sure we bring everyone with us.

Thank you.