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Clerk to Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting Legislative Council
Secretariat

Dear Sirs,

Response to the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting of the Legislative Council on issues related to building a digitally inclusive information society and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

A. Building a Digitally Inclusive Information Society and Bridging the Digital Divide

To narrow the Digital Divide through constructive direct actions is one of the missions of Internet Professionals Association (iProA) and we have successfully launched the following initiatives:

- The Web Care Campaign

In August 2001, iProA launched the Web Care Campaign together with more than 50 supporting communities including Government departments, NGOs, and business corporations. The Campaign demonstrated the power of concerted effort and cross-sectors collaboration. One of the initiatives of the Web Care Campaign is to promote web accessibility. A booklet "Easy Guide to Building No Barrier Web Sites" was published in 2001. The booklet served as a guide to web site creators, commercial organizations, and media channels on how to produce web sites that could be used by all members of the community, including people with physical impairments. Through the 'Web Care Award', 71 web sites from twenty-six organizations were awarded for achieving the primary requirements for "No Barrier Web Sites".

Apart from striving for no barrier web sites, the Web Care Campaign has also been actively promoting the "Unified Internet Training Programme (UITP)". The objective of the Programme was to provide internet training to the general public through better utilization of limited resources, so that ability to access the Internet will be available to more people, especially the elderly, female, and the disabled. So far, more than 1000 volunteers have registered with the campaign, over 400 volunteer tutors have completed their training and received certification. There are 102 voluntary

organizations participating in the programme and more than 7,560 beneficiaries, most of them are elderly and women.

- The Global Alliance for Bridging Digital Divide (GABDD)

With the vision to narrow digital divide globally by leveraging the expertise, best practices, experience and resources of the global network, Internet Professionals Association initiated and founded the “Global Alliance for Bridging Digital Divide” (GABDD) in October 2003 with a group of ICT experts and professionals from **20 countries** including **Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Philippines, Romania, Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Sudan, Uganda, and the United States of America.**

The Missions of GABDD are:

- To provide a global forum for the exchange of ideas and sharing of experience in narrowing digital divide
- To provide a platform for participating organizations to work together to drive global initiatives related to narrowing digital divide
- To share with the participating organizations the experience of successful projects and campaign and the best practices to narrow digital divide
- To contribute to narrowing digital divide between developed and developing countries
- To co-ordinate with and co-operate amongst diversified communities and interested parties in an effort to narrow digital divide
- To unite ICT professionals globally in pursuance of the common goal of narrowing digital divide

GABDD is the first Global ICT Network initiated by Hong Kong ICT Professionals of the same scale. We believe Hong Kong as an international city and one of the most advanced digital economies should contribute to narrow global digital divide.

We are proposing to host a series of GABDD events in Hong Kong next year where, on one hand can enhance Hong Kong position as a leading digital city globally connected and the gateway to China, and on the other hand showcase the world’s standard of best practices in e-content and creativity which will benefit the Hong Kong ICT

industry and general public, as well as attracting participants from Asia and China.

Our comments and suggestions on Government Digital 21 Strategy in the area of building a digitally inclusive information society and bridging digital divide

1. Access to ICT infrastructure for disadvantaged group

- Government's initiative to offer free public facilities of ICT access has stopped progressing forward after establishing of a few hundred "Cyber Points", one "Super Cyber Centre" in the TST area, one much smaller Cyber Centre in the NT area, and computers in libraries. The result is a lack of training facilities to support NGOs initiative to offer ICT training services to the needy and discourage the disadvantaged group to participate in cyber activities.
- We urge the government to establish Cyber Centres in all 18 districts with training facilities and broadband access.

2. Capacity building

- Although there are ICT training programmes offered by the government and the civil societies to disadvantaged groups, this trainings are still far from being sufficient to make Hong Kong a 100% digitally inclusive information society. Only less than 10 % of our senior citizens of age over 55 are computer literate.
- We suggest the government to provide more resources to encourage and support NGO in launching ICT awareness and training programmes to disadvantaged groups and set a target year to make Hong Kong a 100% digitally inclusive information society.

3. Web Accessibility

- To comply with international web accessibility standard is a basic requirement of e-government.
- Although all government web sites are in compliance with the government internal accessibility guidelines, the web site www.esdlife.com that provide the most public services (170 public services from over 50 Government departments and public agencies) is not within the pledges of the government commitment.

- At present, government outsourced projects with servicing web site are not considered as “government web site”. But having equal visual access to all government services is the right of every Hong Kong citizens.
- We suggest that the requirement for the compliance with government internal web accessibility standard should also apply to all future government web related outsourcing and renewing contracts. And the government internal web accessibility standard should be regularly reviewed to stay in line with international standard.

4. Assistive Technology

- Assistive technologies provide ease and convenience for disabled people to access ICT.
- We suggest the government to support the R & D of Assistive technology by offering Assistive technology to be one of the priorities in the application of government Innovative and Technology Fund.

5. Local Content

- Persisting digital divide attests that the path towards providing connectivity and technology infrastructure alone would still not enable a majority of the population to benefit from the current availability of information. Information in foreign languages is largely unreadable to our senior citizen and disadvantaged groups. Being able to operate the computer only in Chinese presents a major obstacle in gaining universal access to information and learning, both basic human rights.
- What is required is to enable all citizens to access and publish content in the languages that they speak and write in, on a daily basis. Access equates to providing local language computing framework and tools to ultimately translate and display this information in Chinese for HK citizen.
- We suggest the government to provide resources to support content development for specific disadvantaged groups and support the R & D of Chinese content enabling technology and application.

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B. Views on Hong Kong Government Participation in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Internet Professionals Association (iProA) has followed the development and participated in the WSIS with interest and we welcome the opportunity to share our view.

We are the only ICT Association in Hong Kong to have obtained Accreditation to the World Summit on the Information Society and our representative will attend the WSIS Geneva Meeting in this December.

In addition to the views in the paper that we share with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, we have the following suggestions:

1. Hong Kong government should participate in the WSIS proactively.
2. Hong Kong government should encourage and support local civil society and business sector to participate in the WSIS proactively.
3. Besides WSIS, there are also a number of global and regional initiatives that focus on a variety of specific areas. These initiatives shall become major driving force behind bridging digital divide as well as becoming worldwide influential forces that all Government and local community should take notice and participate.

We hope the above views and suggestions can be of use to you.

Sincerely Yours,

Elizabeth Quat
President
Internet Professionals Association