



May 17th, 2013

Hon. Moana CARCASSES KATOKAI KALOSIL
Honourable Prime Minister
Minister responsible for ICT and Telecommunications

**Official Speech: Honourable Prime Minister at the Celebration of the
World Telecommunication and Information Society Day**

Honourable Ministers, Members of Parliament, Chiefs, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Director Generals, CEOs, Heads of Government Departments and Statutory Entities, Members of the Press, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have gathered here today to celebrate the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day. This Day marks an anniversary of the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention in 1865, which led to the creation of the International Telecommunication Union.

Today we are joining countries and people in various parts of the World that are using the occasion to raise awareness of possibilities that the use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) can bring to societies and economies, as well as of ways to bridge the digital divide. At the same time, the international community is joining us in our celebration. I would like to thank Dr. Hamadoun Touré, Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), who

will, as he did last year, address our gathering here today. Fittingly for the occasion, his participation has been enabled by ICT tools.

ICTs are information handling tools – a set of goods, applications and services that are used to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information. They include the ‘old’ ICTs of radio, television and telephone, and the ‘new’ ICTs of computers, satellite and wireless technology and the Internet. ICTs also include various applications and services provided using computing devices, including office productivity software, electronic mail, databases, news sites, electronic entertainment, social networking applications, and voice-over-internet applications.

ICTs supercharge social and economic development by enabling access to and exchange of information and services anywhere and anytime, together with rapid processing and vast storage of such information. Thereby ICTs make provision of public and private services, including education and professional development, health information and services, government services, entertainment, information services, professional services and commerce in general, much more effective, efficient, accessible and affordable. They also enhance access to markets, disaster preparedness, as well as democratic participation. ICTs also provide more cost efficient and effective ways to preserve and promote local culture. Costs of economic and social activities are decreased, when ICTs replace transport and postal services. Furthermore, they open new previously non-existent business opportunities.

These are not just vague concepts or dreamy visions of a distant future. Enabling power of ICTs is experienced by us every day – and by “us” I am not just referring to the people present here today. Citizens from Banks to Aneityum are using their mobile phones to communicate with their loved ones and conduct their businesses. It is not only Vila and Luganville that benefit from access to modern

ICTs. Such communities as Lolong, Rensarie, Kwamera, among many others, have also already become part of the Internet-connected society and economy. Furthermore, as I and the whole Cabinet have been able to experience very recently, once we have access to modern ICTs, the Government can be run from Sola just as smoothly and effectively as from Vila.

With this in mind, the Government is fully committed to further maximise the contribution, efficiency and effectiveness of ICTs in achieving our National Vision of “A Just, Educated, Healthy and Wealthy Vanuatu”. Importantly, as far as the Parliament is concerned, there is no such thing as position or opposition on this topic. Both my predecessor in this position and I have been keen supporters of the utilisation of the transformational power of ICTs, and we both have recognised that the importance of this area warrants the need for the Prime Minister to take a direct responsibility for it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the second time we are celebrating the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day. The first time we have gathered here for the same purpose was just a year ago. That year, however, has been very fruitful.

The last 12 months witnessed the launch of the high-quality Government Broadband Network, which connected all the provinces and brought the Government much closer to the people across Vanuatu. The potential of this tool was clearly demonstrated with the first national town hall meeting (or “Leaders’ Face-to-Face”), which enabled citizens in all provinces to discuss current matters directly with their elected leaders.

A foundation for a significant enhancement of the ICT infrastructure was laid with the Government enabling the

deployment of the first submarine fibre cable, which by the end of this year will provide a reliable high-speed and high-quality connection for Vanuatu to global telecommunications networks. The first Internet Exchange in the Pacific, recently launched in Vanuatu, further strengthened the national telecommunications infrastructure and reduced reliance on expensive international links.

I would also like to acknowledge efforts of our private sector operators, which expanded coverage of their services to new islands, including Futuna. They also made a strong headway in upgrading their networks to deliver the high-speed mobile Internet to an increasing proportion of the Vanuatu's population.

ICTs have also been successfully applied to strengthen internal government operations – an upgrade of the National Audit Office's computer systems is a good example of this.

We have also laid solid foundations for effective further Government support to the development of the ICT sector. Institutional framework was significantly enhanced with the creation of the multi-stakeholder National ICT Development Committee, chaired by myself. The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer has been transformed into a strong entity, capable to effectively coordinate and support ICT policy development.

Importantly, in this work we have enjoyed support of our friends in a multitude of international and regional organisations as well as our development partners. I would like to express a special thanks to the Australian Government, which has consistently supported the institutional and policy development in the ICT area in Vanuatu, and, additionally, recently made available a 260 million Vatu fund for ICT development initiatives.

This is a good start. However a lot is yet to be done. A recently conducted first-ever survey of the ICT use in schools has uncovered a rather challenging picture - currently only 5 per cent of students have access to ICTs and only about 6 per cent of schools nationwide have access to the Internet. However, where access to ICTs is available, it produces remarkable results. For example, a 55 per cent increase in students' pass rate from year 12 to year 13 was reported in Rensarie following the provision of the Internet to the College there.

It is therefore clear that efforts to increase the utilisation of ICTs have a potential to transform the development of the country. It is therefore a responsibility of all of us – the Government, businesses, academia, users, civil society, and, ultimately, every citizen - to embrace and contribute to this development process.

You will soon witness further results of this process. Next few months will see a launch of public consultations on important policy documents, namely:

- a National ICT Policy, together with a comprehensive list of strategies enabling the utilisation of a transformative power of ICTs in developing our country;
- a Policy for improving access to telecommunications services for locations which are not or not adequately served by existing services (a Universal Access Policy); and
- a Cybersecurity Policy, which will outline ways to mitigate risks associated with the increasing use of ICTs.

ICT tools will further enhance the public administration – especially in the areas of Customs and Revenue as well as the Law and Justice. All Government computing systems will be brought up to

speed with the implementation of a new Government-wide standard operating environment.

I am specifically proud of the programmes that we are about to launch with the support of our friends in AusAID – specifically pilot programmes supporting:

- a) provision of ICT tools, including the Internet, to schools;
- b) increasing a number of Public Internet Access Points, including Internet Cafes; and
- c) providing students with electronic tablets that will gradually replace paper text books and serve as a window to the vast collection of global knowledge accessible via the Internet.

These pilot programmes, once proven successful, will provide a basis for future Government strategies in utilising ICTs for the socio-economic development, especially in significantly enhancing education of our kids.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you can see, ICTs affect all areas of our lives. This Day, however, is devoted to a specific topic – “ICTs and improving transport safety”. This is our national adaption of this year’s global theme – “ICTs and improving road safety”. We expanded this theme to reflect the specific situation in Vanuatu, including our dependence on air and maritime transport in connecting our country.

I do not need to expand much in describing the importance of this topic. Secretary General of the ITU will explain this in his address. Furthermore, we will hear of the potential of ICTs to address transport safety issues from around 10 presenters, and will be able to see various solutions in more than 20 booths. Please take

advantage of this opportunity to learn first-hand about the importance of ICTs to tackle challenges in this area.

I would like to thank all speakers, presenters and participants. It is you who make this day really valuable.

I would also like to thank a team of dedicated Government officials, especially the staff of the OGCIO and the Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator, for once again putting together a terrific event. Thank you. Your commitment is a shining example to all public servants, and an embodiment of the Government's orientation to the citizen-centric service, which lies at the core of our agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Vanuatu has commenced an ambitious journey to enhance our economy and social lives with the pervasive utilisation of ICTs. Today's event is an important step in this journey. I invite you all to join me in making the most of it – consuming expertise of speakers, exploring demonstrations, speaking to experts. I invite you to use this information to empower yourselves – to better your own lives with the use of these modern tools.

With this I declare the Forum and Showcase of the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2013 in Vanuatu open.