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Honourable Prime Minister
Minister Responsible for ICTs and Telecommunications

Official Speech: Honourable Prime Minister at the ITU Connect Asia-Pacific Summit, Bangkok, Thailand

Honourable Heads of State, Prime Ministers, Ministers, Members of Parliament, CEOs, Members of the Press, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bonjour!

It is a pleasure to speak today at ITU Connect Asia-Pacific. I bring you greetings from my island nation of Vanuatu, and congratulate you on this great event. Today I will take a few minutes to tell you about my country, our ICT achievements, our goals and views, why we are here today, and an invitation. I think what I have to say will surprise you.

First, our country. Vanuatu is an archipelago of 83 islands and 250,000 proud Melanesian people, located north of New Zealand and east of Australia. Our country is one of the most exotic on Earth, with beautiful beaches, excellent resorts, and a mild climate year round. We have the best wreck dive in the world, and fantastic snorkeling and diving. We have the most accessible volcano in the world, that puts on an amazing show every five minutes. Our people are open and friendly, with no ethnic

tensions. Our government is democratic and welcoming to foreign investors.

Our islands are so lovely that one of the most famous island novels in the world was written about us – *Tales of the South Pacific*, by James A. Michener, with its island paradise of “Bali Hai.” That book became the award-winning play, movie and TV show *South Pacific*.

Second, our ICT achievements. All of our people, our press, and all our political parties support the expansion of ICTs. We have an open market with two major operators. We have an excellent, independent ICT regulator who is fair and open. Our mobile penetration has gone from just five percent to over 90 percent of households in just six years.

We built a \$28 million dollar Government Broadband Network that functions extremely well. We established the first Internet Exchange in the Pacific islands, beating our friendly rival Fiji.

We established the Integrated Government Initiative, our version of e-government, which is installing modern applications in all ministries.

We held the first-ever National Face-to-Face Video-Conference, in which the Prime Minister answered tough questions from outer islanders and ordinary citizens.

Just two weeks ago we passed three major policies, namely:

- The National ICT Policy
- The National Cyber-security Policy, and
- The National Universal Access Policy.

All of these policies were drafted using experts, drawing on international experience, but customizing them to local conditions. All the policies were subjected to very broad public consultation,

including video-conferences with villagers and chiefs in outer islands.

Even as we speak, our first submarine cable is being laid. This will link Vanuatu to the outside world with fantastic speed and capacity, for the first time in our history.

Because of all this activity, Vanuatu has moved up in the United Nations ratings of e-government by almost an entire standard deviation, in just two years.

Also because of all this activity and progress, we think that Vanuatu is now one of the best places in the Pacific to invest in ICTs.

Third, views and goals. Vanuatu sees ICTs as a key enabler and energizer for our efforts across all sectors. We see ICTs as important in themselves, and also key in achieving our Millennium Development Goals.

Our target is to be a leader in ICTs in Melanesia and the Pacific. We think we are well on the way to achieving this. We think that international ICT fora need more input from Pacific island nations, and we are ready to step forward into that gap.

Fourth, why we are here. We are concerned about possible loss of language and culture, in the face of the tsunami of Western content. Our people speak English, French, Bislama and over 120 island languages. We are the most linguistically and culturally dense country on Earth. So we are quite concerned about possible linguistic and cultural loss. We want to use ICTs to create local content and document and celebrate local languages and cultures. We have submitted a grant application to this Summit, to support this very important activity. We urge other countries to start using ICTs in this same way.

Also, our country has been rated by the UN as the most threatened on Earth by virtually every form of natural disaster. We are particularly concerned with volcanic activity and cyclones. Hence we have submitted an application to this Summit to support the installation of a network of volcanic and weather monitoring stations. This network will be linked via ICTs, in real time, to our disaster headquarters.

Fifth and last, I want to invite you to visit our country. Many of you may have never heard of Vanuatu before. I hope you will remember Vanuatu now, as a leader in ICTs. Come see for yourself! The perfect date will be National ICT Day on May 17, 2014. I can promise you a huge parade and a warm welcome.

I think you will be enchanted with our beautiful, progressive island nation. This is "My Vanuatu" and I hope to see you there.

Merci boucoup.

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