

**Global Alliance for ICT and Development Global Forum 2010**

**Organized by**

**Abu-Dhabi Systems and Information Center**

**Supported by**

**Abu-Dhabi Government**

**Abu-Dhabi, 5-6 December 2010**

**Opening Statement**

**By**

**Talal Abu-Ghazaleh**

**Chairman, Global Alliance for ICT and Development**

[www.un-gaid.org](http://www.un-gaid.org)

**Chairman & CEO, Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization**

[www.tagorg.com](http://www.tagorg.com)

**Statement by the Chairman of GAID at the Opening session of the Annual Meeting**

**5 December, 2010, Abu Dhabi**

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Distinguished Friends and Colleagues,

It is a great privilege and singular honor for me to welcome you all most warmly to the Annual Meeting and Forum of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The presence of such high-level, eminent and outstanding leaders and personalities from governments, the private sector, civil society and academia is a testimony to the vast and diverse reach of GAID which was created just four years ago . I am deeply grateful to His Royal Highness, Crown Prince General Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan for his patronage and for setting the stage for our deliberations. Our special thanks and appreciation go to the Government of Abu Dhabi for the warm and generous hospitality extended to us, its most valuable contribution and the excellent arrangements made for this meeting. To HE Rashed Al Mansoori, Director General of the Abu Dhabi Systems and Information Centre (or ADSIC), and his team, I extend a special thanks for being our partner all the way. The programs that ADSIC is advancing today, particularly in the areas of eGovernment and ICT for Development, are a true testament to the emirate’s commitment to use ICT to create better socio-economic conditions for all segments of society. And the willingness of the emirate’s leadership to share experiences of their development programs with other governments truly exemplifies our host’s genuine desire to advance realization of the MDGs through ICT from the local to global scene.

GAID is young but has grown rapidly to acquire a global reach and brand. The success of GAID in such a short time derives not only from its unique mission to advance the Millennium Development Goals with ICT as a strategic enabler or its central position anchored as it is under the authority and leadership of the Secretary General of the United Nations. It is said: there is no greater force than an idea whose time has come. GAID is a most timely response of the United Nations to the greatest challenge of the twenty-first century- to harness its technological spirit to create a more humane and equitable and, therefore, more peaceful and more sustainable world for all members of the human family.

GAID’s success comes in equal part from the tremendous dynamic energy and unparalleled commitment that we have been able to marshal from all sectors of society, from hundreds of leaders like you who are gathered here today to thousands of professionals and practitioners from around the world who may not be here physically but are fully plugged into our global network and who believe in the simple but most powerful core values that reflect the best in our common humanity: empathy, compassion, altruism and connectedness. You all have made what GAID is today with your creativity, your generous, sustained contributions, your ideas and your resources. I extend my profoundly felt thanks and appreciation to you and confess that we could not have succeeded without all of you, as its pillars of strength and support.

 In pursuing the MDGs, we sometimes forget where these goals come from: they are rooted in those very core human values that are enshrined in the UN Charter and in the Millennium Declaration: human solidarity, respect for human dignity, equity and international cooperation to ensure a better future for all. The MDGs thus belong to all of us as a shared responsibility which must be assumed by every one of us. GAID has assumed its responsibility in the true spirit of global partnership which is reflected in Goal 8 of the MDGs.

Excellencies,

 We are fortunate to live in a world which is undergoing a change of historic proportions. The most recent manifestation of this historic shift is the evolution of the current financial crisis which originated in the most advanced country of the industrial world. The developed countries are is still suffering from the ensuing financial turmoil and growth in these countries remains anemic.

But, in a historic first, it is the developing countries that have become the new engine of growth in the world economy. For the first time, it is the developing world which is leading the way out of the global recession. And the new dynamism of the South is not confined to the so-called BRICS or the Asian Tigers alone. The Arab World and Africa are also on the move and so is Latin America. A key driving force of this economic resurgence is the spread of ICT. It is our responsibility to bring on board those least developed and African countries that are still not part of this historic revival. This is within our reach. It is doable now.

When I assumed the Chairmanship of GAID a year ago, I had only one purpose in mind: to deliver concrete and tangible results for developing countries. At our annual meeting in Monterrey, last year, I proposed to refocus the mission of GAID around one goal: place the power of ICT in the service of the MDGs.

At our Board meeting in Monterrey, last year, we made a compact that we will build a dynamic, web-based Matrix of ICT solutions for MDGs to help countries to accelerate progress towards their MDG programmes and projects.

I submitted this initiative to the Secretary General on February 8, 2010 for his support. With his vision and sagacity, he immediately saw the innovative character and unique value of this initiative and gave it his full personal blessing.

Today, a year later, I stand before you to announce, in all humility, that we are delivering on our promise. We are in the process of creating a unique and powerful, web-based engine and platform, the MDG eNabler, that will be made available to all countries free of cost as a one-stop –shop , where they can go to learn, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their development programmes and projects .

The engine has been tested in real-country environment and has benefitted from extensive consultations and inputs through international gatherings, including a High-Level Meeting last September in New York, in conjunction with the United Nations MDG Summit. It was hailed by the Secretary General who called upon all stakeholders to join it and make it a success thus helping to move us from ‘Advocacy to Action’.

This set of resources and tools has been demonstrated to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of development planners and managers, and save time and resources. But, above all, it helps build capacity and thus empowers developing country governments to become more self-reliant in achieving their national development goals, including delivering on their goals for eGovernment, eEducation, eHealth, eEmployment, eEnvironment and others .

 GAID, together with the help of all stakeholders, is creating for the United Nations and for the entire the world community, one very important and innovative means to deliver on the much bigger promise to achieve the MDGs by 2015. Now it is the task and responsibility of all of us to use it, nourish and develop it further and make it grow as a living animal so that it’s value-added and edge can be sustained.

The MDG eNabler has fired the imagination of many ICT experts and users from around the world. As a result, a whole community of contributors and stakeholders from around the world has coalesced around it so that it has become a truly community-based initiative. We must use the next two days to build on this momentum and work together to continue its development.

The success and sustainability of the eNabler relies on the commitment and substantive contribution of all members of the Alliance and the broader ICT development community – including all of you here today. We must challenge one another to re-think the way we are going about our business to ensure that we are doing everything possible to harness the potential of ICT to transform the way we are going about social and economic development efforts.

This morning’s session is meant to do just this – to perform a collective reality check on how we are going about using ICT in development and what we need to do to make a real impact on those that need our help the most.

This afternoon we will break into smaller groups for the Solution Salons – which are meant to drive participatory, focused, action-oriented discussions on the key issues in our field. These Salons will give all of you an opportunity to voice your opinions and share your experiences with fellow experts from around the world.

I urge you all, together with the moderators of the salons, to work towards developing workable solutions and follow-up actions during the salons that you can present to the plenary tomorrow.

The Alliance is mandated to serve you – the development stakeholders working tirelessly to make a real difference in the lives of those living in poverty around the world. We hope that this Global Forum gives all of you the global platform that is necessary for change-making, action-oriented policy dialogue and innovative strategy building to just that – and to move from advocacy to action!

I come from the developing world where I belong and hence is my commitment and eagerness to deliver on this.

I salute all those who are supporting the initiative, in particular, our colleagues from the UN agencies, UNDESA, UNESCO, WHO, UNDP, WFP, UNCTAD, - from regional organizations such as the Arab League and the African Union and others. Thank you for your support and I welcome you warmly.

I hail Intel, Microsoft, IBM, Ericcson, Nokia-Siemens, Telephonica and other ICT companies for their support and interest to join and make it a success.

It is gratifying to know that the Government of Bahrain offered to host an ICT for MDG Center in Bahrain dedicated to capacity building and consulting for African countries. Thanks to Bahrain Government and I salute the Bahrain representatives at this meeting.

I commend to you to go live in March 2011 with the MDG eNabler as your ‘GPS for Development’ in cyberspace.

I thank you all for your support and kindness and for your confidence in me.