

**Members of the Telecommunications Community, Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

I know that today you have been debating some difficult and challenging questions. You have discussed issues that have a direct bearing on the development and profitability of your enterprises. That alone makes those issues vitally important and justifies every mental exertion that marked your deliberations today.

At least some of your topics encompassed far more than your own enterprises. They are global issues that impact everyone. Well, perhaps not quite everyone. Our world's population is now over seven billion. About four billion of those people are not yet connected to the Internet. But almost three billion are connected. And the percentage of connected human beings grows annually far more rapidly than the population as a whole. We cannot deny that the Internet is a worldwide phenomenon and that billions of people have a stake in the way in which it functions.

I would like to spend a few minutes reflecting on the principle of net neutrality. I will doubtlessly echo some of today's discussion. But I would be surprised if you all agreed on a single position regarding net neutrality. As the Washington Post recently observed (and I quote), **“the net neutrality debate isn't black and white. Participating in it fully means wading into those shades of gray.”** I suspect that most of us are wading.

I take net neutrality to mean that the Internet should be an impartial conduit for the information that travels through it. In a way, the idea originated in 1860 when the United States of America enacted a law to facilitate communication between the Atlantic and Pacific states by electric telegraph. The law specified that (and I quote) **“messages received from any individual, company, or corporation, or from any telegraph lines connecting with this line at either of its termini, shall be impartially transmitted in the order of their reception, excepting that the dispatches of the government shall have priority.”**

Following that principle, if I google SAMENA Telecommunications Council, nothing will impede my connecting with Mr. Google and hence with the SAMENA website. Of course, Google processes over 38,000 searches per second, so I may have difficulty ranking my search within that group. But I know that my search will proceed in that particular second and not be relegated to the group of 38,000 searches in the next second.

By the way, when I reach that SAMENA website, I would be reminded that this council aims to develop a unified voice among operators and service providers so as **“to enable, to shape, and to affect changes in policies and regulations,”** in cooperation with national administrations. I admire your resolve and appreciate the leadership of Mr. Bocar A. BA in bringing you leaders together today. In seeking unity, you have been operating in accord with the great Edmund Burke’s view that (and I quote) **“all government—indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act—is founded on compromise....”**

I am delighted that so many points of view and so many different companies and countries are represented here today, and I welcome you all to Dubai and the United Arab Emirates as you seek common ground. Your meeting here today reflects the growing importance of the United Arab Emirates in the world of technology. Under the wise leadership of our President, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan, our country values the proper use of the Internet to advance human welfare. We believe in the importance of the thoughtful analysis of all aspects of its great potential. We must be both responsive and visionary as we discover how to best use and apply modern technology in a global context.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In that context, the role of compromise looms large when various parties try to reach consensus on net neutrality. Few users of the Internet are willing to tolerate anything but equal status with all other users of the Internet. Many Internet service providers would like to differentiate among users and be able to bill major content providers a premium for using their pipes. That practice

would raise the prospect that start-ups, entrepreneurs, and small businesses might eventually have to pay Internet service providers to get the same fast, efficient distribution that, for example, Yahoo can afford. Some argue that competition or enlightened self-interest will take care of all potential problems, but others insist that government must pass laws to guarantee net neutrality. In some parts of the world, many people would welcome laws that prohibit the government from controlling anything related to the Internet even in the name of national security or cultural beliefs.

We are indeed wading into shades of gray. As we wade, we must discuss and try to understand the value of everything that is at stake in regard to net neutrality. Is it that “**creativity, innovation and a free and open marketplace**” are at stake, to quote the words of Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google? You leaders in the telecommunications community are, in a sense, heads of communities responsible for your members—some of those three billion users of the Internet.

People with those responsibilities have a duty, according to our country’s founder the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan, “**to deal with one another [through] tolerance, compassion, and dialogue rather than with the language of confrontations, wars, and destruction.**” I am confident that your dialogue today is fulfilling that duty and that you are acutely aware of its importance. We all treasure the Internet and must agree with Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the creator of the World Wide Web, who said that being able to connect freely and equally to the Internet is (and I quote) “**the fundamental social basis of the Internet, and, now, the society based on it.**” Certainly the global society of the United Arab Emirates depends on the Internet and would change dramatically without it. I therefore hope that you continue your dialogue in the spirit of compromise, tolerance, and compassion. Billions of people are counting on you. My best wishes for a productive and successful conference.

Thank you.