

**FREE AND OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE
ASIA PACIFIC (FOSSAP) CONSULTATION**

Organised by UNDP/APDIP and IDRC
9-11 February 2004, Kuala Lumpur

**Welcoming Remarks
By
Anis Yusal Yusoff
UNDP Malaysia**

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of Dr. Richard Leete, UNDP Resident Representative in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all the foreign delegates to Malaysia and all of you to the Free and Open Source Software Asia-Pacific Consultation.

At the outset, let me first thank and congratulate Mr. Shahid Akhtar and his team for their efforts in planning and organizing this important and timely consultation.

The international development community is focused on halving the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty. This is a significant challenge for all of us, one that is compounded by the fact that many of these poor people, live in rural areas. Rural poverty represents one of the greatest challenges facing us today.

We have been told by experts that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is transforming the global economy by providing a new engine for development, as well as changing its fundamental dynamics. We are told that ICT can serve as a critical enabler for poverty reduction and for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. ICT has the potential to create jobs, improve the delivery of and access to basic services in health and education, facilitate information sharing and knowledge creation, and most importantly increase the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of government, business and civil society.

Unfortunately, diffusion of ICT remains highly uneven across and within nations. Market forces alone will not mend this process and in fact tend to allow ICT and its benefit in the hands of a few. The high cost of ICT is one major issue. All of us are here, because we are aware that the high cost is an obstacle and one of the many reasons for digital divide.

In the past year, within the context of ICT for development, there has been a marked increase in interest towards Free and Open Source Software. What was once considered as a technology trend is now being perceived as a powerful tool for development. Countries around the world are in the process of implementing

Free and Open Source Software initiatives and policies. From advanced economies such as the European Union and the United Kingdom, to developing nations such as Brazil, South Africa, Vietnam and Thailand, initiatives are in progress to realize the benefits of Free and Open Source Software.

However, the usage of Free and Open Source Software for development is in its infancy. There are still many challenges that need to be overcome to fully realize its benefits. There is a need to create awareness among policy makers.

The United Nations system in general and UNDP in particular, has an abundance of development knowledge and information in its publications, in its databases, on its websites, and in its human capital. With its comparative advantages in these areas, it can support the usage of Free and Open Source Software in national policies and programmes. It can deliver to decision-makers on demand, sound advice, comparative experiences, past lessons learned, and world-class knowledgeable expertise. It can play a role in the generation and dissemination of new ideas for the benefit of all, especially the poor.

There is no single universal template for the implementation of Free and Open Source Software initiatives. Each nation differs in its level of development. However, there are common issues within the Asia-Pacific context that we hope participants at this Consultation will be able to discuss from the national perspectives. UNDP hopes that this Consultation will identify some best practices provide the opportunity for the sharing of experiences and come up with ways to cooperate together to capitalize on this opportunity.

We need to make Free and Open Source Software an integral part of development assistance and solutions, only then would developing countries expand the reach and effectiveness of their initiatives in addressing economic, social and digital divides in innovative and effective ways.

Once again on behalf of Dr. Leete and UNDP, I would like to wish you well in your deliberation. Thank you.