Good afternoon,

Let me begin by thanking you for being here today.

If the Internet were a country, its economy would be among the top 5 largest in the world. And every minute on the Internet, Google records 4 million searches, 10 million WeChat messages are sent, and 100,000 tweets are posted.

The digital economy has grown beyond our imagination. And, as the example of Kenya has shown, this offers enormous potential for development. The question for us, today, is how to more effectively harness it.

We need to tackle this question now, while we are still in the early days of the digital era.

By next year already, there will be 3 times more connected devices than people on the planet.

Every second, there are 8 new Internet users added worldwide.

We can only imagine the changes that cloud computing, 3D printing, and the Internet of Things will unleash in the years to come.
But why does this matter to UNCTAD?

It matters to UNCTAD because this digital revolution is changing the very fabric of all of our economies. It alters what and how we produce and, therefore what and how we trade.

And according to the figures we just release today, in 2015, Business-to-consumer and business-to-business e-commerce sales in 2015 amounted to more than $22 trillion USD. And it is one of the fastest growing segments of global trade.

From UNCTAD’s perspective, our priority is to ensure that this booming digital economy creates new opportunities for players that have traditionally been on the margins of trade.

In the pre-digital age, only massive corporations had the economies of scale to operate on a global level. Today, any entrepreneur with a laptop and a big idea can access global markets. Digitalization does not only reduce entry costs, it can also reduce information asymmetries. And it can help bridging the urban-rural divide in many countries.

But these development gains will not materialize automatically, nor will they --left to their own devise -- be distributed equitable.

We still need to address several key policy challenges.

E-commerce – like other technology-induced changes – is transformational by its very nature. This means it creates both winners and losers -- both opportunities and risks.
The capacity and ability to participate in E-commerce varies greatly among countries. In fact, the “E-commerce divide” is much wider than the “Digital divide.” And because the digital economy is increasingly inseparable from the real economy, the e-commerce divide can quickly translate into real economic divides.

Today, and even more in the future, to be unconnected is to fall behind.

This is why this round table is both timely and relevant. In the coming session, our panelists will identify some pressing policy challenges and suggest ways to overcome them.

Afterwards, I welcome all of you to stay for the launch of the eTrade for All initiative, a multi-stakeholder vehicle for supporting the implementation of Agenda 2030. This represents a novel approach to providing a more coherent, efficient, and transparent support to developing countries in the area of E-commerce readiness.

Let me stop here and turn it over to Kati Suominen, who will be moderating this session.

Thank you again for your interest and participation.