

## **New National Council to Get the ICT Ball Rolling in Mongolia**

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by Mark Heard

The Mongolian Government took a big step towards the sustainable development of information and communication technology (ICT) in Mongolia on Feb. 7, with the confirmation that a national council would be formed to address policy issues pertaining to the young industry.

The confirmation came at the Development of Mongolia and ICT National Seminar at the Chinggis Khaan Hotel in Ulaanbaatar, which was attended by 120 representatives of international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and many high-level Mongolian politicians—including Prime Minister Nambar Enkhbayar.

“We need a forward-looking policy in terms of ICT promotion in Mongolia...” said the Prime Minister. “The government of Mongolia is eager to come up with a well-designed plan”

Information and Communication Technology, encompassing Internet and e-mail technologies, software, and telecommunications, among others, is seen as an excellent opportunity for Mongolia—a land-locked country with a relatively small population—to better communicate on a global scale and to improve the social and economic well-being of its citizens.

When ICT-related businesses are able to use new opportunities, fresh sources of sustainable income can develop. The new tools can also improve the efficiency and transparency of government, as well as launch administrative services to the public that were previously unavailable.

The new council is to be made up of nine participants, with members of civil societies, the private sector and government each nominating three representatives. The council evolved from *ICT Vision - 2010*, a “blueprint” ratified on Feb. 4, 2000, which is a strategy of the Mongolian Parliament for the development of the industry. The Feb. 7 seminar aimed at moving beyond this strategy, and the council will be working on a more pragmatic national plan of action for ICT in Mongolia.

“Let us address the dual challenge we face: first to work together to define a national plan of action,” said [United Nations Development Program](#) Resident Representative for Mongolia Saraswathi Menon in her opening remarks at the seminar, “secondly, and even more importantly, to combine our energies to successfully implement the action plan.”

One of the projects to evolve from *ICT Vision – 2010* has been MIDAS, a cooperative effort between the Mongolian Government, UNDP and the [Mongolian Foundation for Open Society](#) (MFOS). The program works towards creating a knowledge-based society and developing the use of ICT in Mongolia by providing small grants for the development of ICT applications to local companies, individuals and governmental and

non-governmental organizations. The UNDP and MFOS joined forces to fund the project and provide advice on policy to the MIDAS team.

Grants could be provided for initiatives such as web site portals, rural tourism and commerce web sites, small to medium cost software applications, content development and multimedia applications, to name a few. The newly formed council will have final word on the program's grant applications.

"We are now able to be a part of the global world, and contribute to the global economy," said Tuvdendorj Galbaatar, member of the Steering Committee of MFOS, at the seminar.

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A broad range of issues were presented and discussed at the seminar by both participants and the audience. Among the hottest topics were calls for an ambitious program of ICT human resource development and the need for a legal framework to stimulate the industry.

"We need to come up with proper copyright legislation, in particular," said the Prime Minister, "and e-commerce legislation."

Dr. Erdenebaatar, director of the Computer Science Management School at the Mongolia Technical University, addressed the ongoing needs for developing the skills of the country's ICT workers. He outlined the growth of an internal culture sensitive to the importance of ICT, the restructuring and viewing of business opportunities from a new, modern angle, and the engagement of ICT workers and the improvement of their capabilities as important issues.

"Human resource development is a global issue facing every country, and it's more a question of a lack of skilled personnel in the ICT sector..." he said. "Computer skills training and retraining is required. To improve and accomplish this, we need a proper legal framework and foreign and domestic investment needs to be promoted in this field."

There are currently over 2,000 Mongolians studying computer management in the country.

"This new sector can provide job opportunities for many," said Menon. "UNDP actively supports these e-job activities, especially in Mongolia, where a young, eager, well-educated generation is ready to board the ICT train."

Prime Minister Enkhbayar echoed these thoughts.

"It is a young industry, and with our country's young population, this industry is just for Mongolia," he said.

Other speakers at the seminar included: A. Ochirhuu, chairperson of the SIH Standing Committee on Economic Affairs; G. Ulambayar, director of the Policy and Coordination Department of Road, Transport, Information, Communications and Tourism; Dr. Enkhbat, CEO of Datacom; R. Ganbold, general director of Infocon; S. Natsagdorj, general director of Bodicomputer; Brian Darian, project coordinator of the Global Technology Network; and Ch. Ganbold, director of the Electronic Daily News.

The Mongolian Government, SIH Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, UNDP and the Mongolian Foundation for Open Society jointly organized the seminar.