Speech by Secretary DIT during launch of India chapter of Wiki Educator in collaboration with One World South Asia and Global Knowledge Partnerships on November 15, 2008 as Guest of Honour

Professor M. S. Swaminathan distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to be present here this afternoon for the launch of the India chapter of Wiki Educator in collaboration with One World South Asia and Global Knowledge Partnership.

2.   Wiki Educator is a community resource supported by Commonwealth of Learning for the development of free educational content. It aims to build a thriving and sustainable global community dedicated to the design, development and delivery of free content for learning, in realization of a free version of the education curriculum by 2015.

3.   Driven by the learning for development agenda, it focusses on building capacity in the use of Media wiki and related free software technologies for mass collaboration in the authoring of free content and developing free content for use in schools, polytechnics, universities and vocational education institutions. Wiki Educator also facilitates the establishment of community networks and collaboration with existing free content initiatives in education and fostering new technologies that will widen access,

improve quality and reduce the cost associated with providing education, primarily through the use of free content.

4.   An apparently extraordinary trend of "Giving Knowledge for Free" is emerging. Although learning resources are often considered as key intellectual property in a competitive higher education world, more and more institutions and individuals are sharing digital learning resources over the Internet openly and without cost, as open educational resources (OER).

5.   Wiki Educator was already providing educators with a platform to develop open education resources and post free-to-use educational content. The India chapter will now put information in the Indian context.

6.   How does one network with educators around the world? How do we bring resources together to maximise output? These are some of the questions which will get answered with the launch of the India chapter of Wiki Educator, a global community that enables e-learning.

7.   I understand that the Indian chapter of Wiki Educator includes a host of educators from Delhi University and Indira Gandhi National Open University. For educators working in the field of distance education, Wiki Educator is all about technology enabled learning. With the India chapter one can now get together with other educators from around the country for development of course material. It is also a great platform to get to know people doing good work.

8.   The trend towards sharing open source software and open access publishing is already so strong that it is generally thought of as a movement. It is now complemented by the trend towards sharing learning resources – the open educational resources movement.

9.   I would now like to touch upon some aspects and programs which would enhance the usefulness of free content.

10.   ICTs are a fundamental element of an emerging global knowledge society. They may lead to greater opportunities for those who can partake of them; but they may also lead to greater exclusion for those who cannot.

11.   While India is a leading country in the IT sector globally, the benefits of the Internet revolution have not yet fully percolated to the everyday life of the common man. This is particularly true for those in rural areas.

12.   Inclusive development is an imperative. There are several challenges that must be addressed in order to make the vision of a truly inclusive knowledge society a realty.

13.   Perhaps the first challenge towards enabling a solution on such a large scale is to review the issues related to access – broadband access; access to technology; access to content. This is no easy matter especially in India which is diverse in both geography and demography.

14.   Diversity is particularly important in India which is a truly multi-lingual society. Only a small percentage of Indians can read and write English. We believe Indians should be able to use the Internet in their own languages. We have as many as 22 official languages and 11 scripts.

15.   Wiki Educator promises a lot of opportunity for content proliferation through Indian Language enablement. DIT through its Technology Development for Indian Languages (TDIL) Programme develops Language Technology Tools and Content Development Tools in Indian Languages which are being distributed for free use.

16.   Under "National Roll Out Plan" Project of TDIL, content generation and management tools such as Multilingual Dictionary and Content Management Tools in Indian Languages have been developed which can be downloaded from Indian Language Data Centre Website http://www.ildc.gov.in.

17.   These tools could be used for Indian Language Content Generation which could be integrated in conjunction with applications like Wiki Educator. This will accelerate collaborative development of contents in Indian Languages. There is a vast potential for translation of available content and these could be best done through Open Source collaborative model.

18.   Government has launched an ambitious project to establish a hundred thousand village Internet kiosks. A National broadband

network is being rolled out to give connectivity to these centers. These centers are being established through Public Private Partnership model. The centers would provide access to education, telemedicine and public services to hitherto unreached sections of society. These hundred thousand centers are expected to be operational by June 2009.

19.   In the DIT we have identified e-Learning as a thrust area. E-Learning is a combination of learning services and technology to provide high value integrated learning; anytime, anyplace.

20.   The main thrust of the e-learning programme of the Department is to effectively integrate e-learning methodology and approach with the conventional classroom system to maximize the benefits flowing from the traditional education system, increase its reach to more learners and spread e-learning from teaching of IT related subjects to other subjects in the school curricula.

21.   This year, we are hosting the 3rd meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to be convened between 3rd to 6th December, 2008 at Hyderabad. This forum is an initiative for multi stakeholder policy discussions under the auspices of United Nations. It is expected that more than 1,200 delegates from 80 – 100 countries will be participating in the IGF. The mandate of the forum is to discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet Governance and interface with appropriate inter-governmental organisations, accelerate the availability of the Internet in the developing world.

22.   Access to the next one billion people and the use of Internet for education and development would be important themes of the IGF.

23.   The forum would be participated and addressed by experts and policymakers from Civil Society, Academia and Government from within and outside country. I invite you all to participate in the said conference.

24.   The India chapter of Wiki Educator will surely help widening access to knowledge and learning for development.

25.   I wish the India Chapter of the Wiki Educator a very successful future.

Thank You.