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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)****REPORT****TELECENTRE LEADERS FORUM – ARAB MASHREQ REGION  
AMMAN, 15-16 JULY 2009****Summary**

Under the patronage of the Jordanian Minister of Information and Communications Technology, His Excellency Basem Al Rousan, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) co-organized the Telecentre Leaders Forum – Arab Mashreq Region in partnership with World Links Arab Region, telecentre.org, the Egypt ICT Trust Fund and the Jordanian Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MoICT). The forum was held at the MoICT in Amman on 15 and 16 July 2009. The workshop was an integral part of a global project entitled Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities, which is jointly implemented by four United Nations regional commissions, with ESCWA as the lead commission. The project aims to empower poor and disadvantaged communities by transforming selected existing ICT access points (telecentres) into hubs in a global knowledge network.

The forum aimed to: (a) convene telecentre practitioners, network leaders and telecentre support organizations in order to build functional relationships and lay the foundation for telecentre networks in ESCWA member countries; (b) share experience through the presentation of best practice and case studies in a number of participating countries; (c) build the capacity of participants to share experience and network using online tools; and (d) expand the Middle East and North Africa telecentre network by engaging new partners and practitioners.

Participants agreed on the importance of communicating through Web portals in order to exchange ideas and best practice, and develop knowledge for increased telecentre productivity. Following on from an earlier workshop, held in Beirut in December 2008, telecentre leaders were also advised to adopt more effective marketing techniques in order to attract more people to interact via the telecentre's website, make good use of its services and contribute to its sustainability.

A total of 45 participants from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen attended the forum, which was both characterized by a high level of interaction between the participants and positively valued by all stakeholders.

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## Introduction

1. In late 2006, the five United Nations regional commissions<sup>1</sup> launched a United Nations Development Account project entitled Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities (KN4DC), the activities of which were planned to take place over a period of three years, ending in 2009. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was chosen as the lead commission for the implementation of the project, the main objective of which is to empower disadvantaged communities by transforming selected ICT access points/telecentres into knowledge hubs that are networked at the regional and global levels. This will be achieved by providing, developing, organizing, sharing and disseminating knowledge pertinent to targeted communities in such key areas of sustainable development as employment, education, gender and health.
2. ESCWA and three other regional commissions, ECA, ECLAC and ESCAP<sup>2</sup>, have already implemented the following project activities: (a) review and assessment of ICT access points in various regions worldwide; (b) development of a detailed implementation plan for the project; (c) organization of regional stakeholder meetings to discuss project activities; (d) preparation of regional and global strategies for the transformation and networking process; (e) preliminary design and implementation of a regional knowledge-based portal; and (f) training of key telecentre staff on transforming access points into networked knowledge hubs.
3. ESCWA also carried out a variety of other activities in relation to the KN4DC project, leading to the launching of the regional knowledge portal,<sup>3</sup> a website that will continue to achieving the goal of information and knowledge exchange. This portal, created during December 2008, contains websites for all telecentres<sup>4</sup> participating in the KN4DC project. Each website provides news and information about the local community served by the telecentre and can be used as a source of information on communities in the region.
4. In organizing the forum and launching the regional knowledge portal, ESCWA partnered<sup>5</sup> with a number of other regional and global entities implementing similar projects, namely World Links Arab Region (WLAR), telecentre.org, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Egypt ICT Trust Fund (EITF) and the Jordanian Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MoICT) in order to organize the Telecentres Leaders Forum – Arab Mashreq Region. The combined efforts of these bodies in the organization of this event both increased its value and maximized its benefits.
5. During the forum, telecentre leaders participating in KN4DC and other regional projects were brought together to share experiences and network. The principal topics of discussion included the use of such online tools as portals and sustainability models; a number of interactive sessions were held in which participants could share success stories and lessons learned from unsuccessful experiences and plan ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

<sup>2</sup> ESCAP also handled the ECE portion of the project.

<sup>3</sup> [www.knowledgenets.net](http://www.knowledgenets.net).

<sup>4</sup> Four sites in Lebanon, three in the Syrian Arab Republic and one in Egypt, Jordan, the Sudan and Yemen.

<sup>5</sup> ESCWA, through the KN4DC project, has established a network of telecentres in six ESCWA member countries, namely Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, the Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and these started exchanging knowledge in 2008. The EITF established a project in Egypt named the IT Clubs for National Information Exchange, WLAR was involved in a number of initiatives in the Arab region to disseminate and incorporate ICT in education, and telecentre.org runs a global network of telecentres.

6. Thirty-two telecentre leaders, mainly managers and trainers, representing 30 telecentres,<sup>6</sup> participated in the workshop under the guidance and supervision of 13 representatives from regional and global organizations.

7. Among other topics, the workshop tackled the issue of sustainability of telecentres, exchanged experience and best practice on how to run a telecentre and highlighted the importance of using portals for networking.

## II. DISCUSSION TOPICS

8. At the start of the workshop, facilitators Mr. Georges Younes, IT Officer at ESCWA, Ms. Zeina Maraqa, Regional Project Manager at WLAR, and Mr. Karim Kasim, Project Manager at EITF, described the forum as a catalyst of knowledge sharing and networking, not only between telecentres within regional or national projects or programmes, but also between telecentres in the Arab Mashreq.

9. The topics addressed in the workshop sessions are summarized below.

### A. OVERVIEW OF TELECENTRE PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

10. Mr. Mansour Farah, Senior IT Officer at ESCWA and manager of the KN4DC project, presented the scope, goals and methodology of the project and introduced the participating telecentres. The KN4DC project began in 2006 and aims to empower poor and disadvantaged communities by transforming selected ICT access points in remote and rural areas into knowledge hubs by connecting them via a regional and global knowledge network. A link to the presentation can be found in annex II.

11. Mr. Karim Kasim introduced the Egypt IT Club, a project that is being implemented by IDRC in partnership with the Egypt ICT Trust Fund. Started in 2006, the project aims to provide IT services and Internet access for disadvantaged communities in an effort to enhance their socio-economic development.

### B. EXPECTATIONS OF TELECENTRE LEADERS

12. Given the diversity of their backgrounds, participating telecentre leaders came to the forum with a variety of issues and objectives. Some needed to acquire marketing skills, others hoped to learn how to find sponsors for telecentre activities, and others aimed to promote the establishment of a regional network to facilitate knowledge sharing with other telecentres in the Arab Mashreq.

13. During the first interactive session, participants were asked about their expectations of the workshop. These can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Acquiring new tools for improved networking between telecentres in the Arab region;
- (b) Meeting fellow telecentre leaders and learning about their best practice, success stories and lessons learned;
- (c) Discussing general and country-specific challenges and possible ways to overcome them;
- (d) Promoting better collaboration with telecentre.org;
- (e) Increasing the sustainability of knowledge hubs;
- (f) Improving skills for marketing the services offered by telecentres;
- (g) Reactivating the network between knowledge hubs.

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<sup>6</sup> Twelve in Jordan, seven in the Syrian Arab Republic, four in Lebanon, three in Palestine, two in Egypt and one in both the Sudan and Yemen.

14. This exercise clearly demonstrated the widespread concern among participants as to how to market their services in such a way as to ensure the sustainability of their telecentres. The workshop directly tackled this issue by encouraging participants to share their marketing experiences and best practice, and to build their networking capacities.

### C. CHALLENGES FACING TELECENTRES IN THE REGION

15. Participants also highlighted a number of key challenges facing telecentres. Telecentres in rural areas, whether in the ESCWA region or elsewhere, face major sustainability challenges. Achieving sustainability is a critical element in the long-term development of telecentres and knowledge networks and its attainment was therefore one of the key goals of the forum. Many other challenges facing telecentres are related to a lack of management skill and the high cost of equipment.

16. Group work was key to the success of the forum. Facilitators ensured optimal interaction by all participants. For the second interactive session, the telecentre leaders were divided into four groups, each of which was asked to highlight the main challenges faced by telecentres in the region. The results of the brainstorming can be summarized as follows:

- (a) High cost of infrastructure;
- (b) Shortage of ICT equipment;
- (c) Slow and costly Internet connectivity;
- (d) Lack of management skills;
- (e) Low sustainability and funding;
- (f) Weakness in marketing and promotional skills for telecentres and their services;
- (g) Cultural barriers in certain communities regarding the use of ICT, especially by women;
- (h) Low levels of community awareness of the importance of using ICT;
- (i) Non-existence of a governmental body to support telecentres in Lebanon and Palestine;
- (j) Scarcity of skilled trainers;
- (k) Lack of networking with telecentres from different countries;
- (l) Remote geographical location of certain telecentres;
- (m) Weakness of content in certain locally customized courses;
- (n) Lack of recognized certification in certain telecentres.

17. Participants were then given the opportunity to present the above issues for discussion and possible solution. It is noteworthy that many of the challenges and problems raised were common to all participants, particularly those related to infrastructure, sustainability, funding and marketing costs.

### D. TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

18. The essence of the knowledge network is the knowledge hub, which is an ICT access point that disseminates knowledge and information related to the socio-economic development of the local community. The upgrade from an access point to a fully-fledged knowledge hub simply requires the addition of a number of activities at the centre.

19. During an earlier workshop on knowledge sharing and networking (Beirut, December 2008), Mr. Nouredine Cheikh Obeid, ESCWA Regional Knowledge Manager for the KN4DC project, suggested a number of activities and services that could be of use in transforming an ICT access point into a knowledge hub. These may include using ICT as a research tool; raising awareness on such issues as gender and health; and giving the community local, regional and global reach by establishing websites and online discussion forums.

20. Activities and plans on how to become a knowledge hub were the subject of the presentation made by Mr. Cheikh Obeid at the forum. He outlined the past and current status of telecentres in the Arab Mashreq and proposed a number of services that could be implemented at an ICT access point in order to transform it

into a knowledge hub and connect it to other hubs via regional and global knowledge networks. A link to his presentation can be found in annex II.

#### E. TELECENTRES OFFERING SPECIALIZED SERVICES

21. Telecentres have an operation methodology that takes into consideration the diverse activities and services offered by each telecentre in response to the needs of the local community. Four telecentre presentations were scheduled on the first day of the workshop, aiming to shed light on services for groups with special needs.

22. Mr. Jibreel Saudi from the Jordanian Knowledge Stations programme<sup>7</sup> gave a presentation on the activities of the Ma'an Knowledge Station, which, in addition to providing common services, caters for children with special needs and women. As an example of the work tailored to these particular groups, the telecentre has produced a short film which was used to increase community awareness of common types of ear, nose and throat infections. A link to this presentation can be found in annex II.

23. Ms. Khawla Alomari, representing the Deir Yousef knowledge station in Jordan, made a presentation highlighting activities undertaken at the telecentre. This knowledge station focuses on building the capacity of the local community in agriculture and small-scale industries. Workshops held at the telecentre cover a variety of topics, including straw basket production, mushroom cultivation and awareness of medicinal and aromatic plants. A link to her presentation can be found in annex II.

24. Mr. Nabil Eid from Salamieh telecentre in the Syrian Arab Republic gave a presentation on services offered for persons with disabilities, highlighting success stories of people able to lead productive lives despite their disabilities. Many services, customized courses and course delivery methods are available at the Salamieh telecentre to accommodate people with physical disabilities, visual impairment, hearing impairment and learning disabilities. A link to his presentation can be found in annex II.

25. Ms. Suha Syouf from the Princess Basma Youth Resource Centre in Jordan outlined a selection of the wide range of activities offered by the telecentre. Her well-received presentation also included five audio and video files which had been generated by young Jordanians at the telecentre and which were of particular interest to participants. A link to her presentation can be found in annex II.

#### F. TELECENTRE SOUK

26. On the second day of the forum, telecentre leaders were invited to a telecentre souk, an activity that required participants to pitch and market ideas. Twenty-five telecentre representatives volunteered, each of whom was allocated three minutes to pitch his or her proposals, a number of which are listed below:

- (a) Soliciting sponsors from the local community;
- (b) Marketing through school visits;
- (c) Being concise, yet efficient in choosing marketing slogans;
- (d) Marketing the telecentre as a conference venue;
- (e) Introducing e-farming, a means of making information on agricultural practices and prices available online;
- (f) Offering reduced rates for pensioners;
- (g) Marketing ICT training courses offered by telecentres to governmental and non-governmental organizations.

27. The telecentre souk proved extremely popular and was highly rated by participants in the forum.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.ks.gov.jo](http://www.ks.gov.jo).

## G. USING TOOLS TO INCREASE KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND NETWORKING

28. Web portals are useful tools for facilitating knowledge sharing between telecentres, in particular for telecentres that are geographically distant from each other. Four such portals were presented during the forum.<sup>8</sup>
29. The KN4DC portal, which was officially launched during the forum, was presented by Mr. Marc Khayat, Research Assistant at ESCWA. The portal currently services the 11 telecentres that are affiliated with the KN4DC project. A link to the presentation can be found in annex II.
30. Mr. Karim Kasim presented the telecentre.org portal and outlined its development path as it moved from being an English-only site to a multi-lingual portal supporting English, French, Spanish and Arabic.
31. Mr. Nabil Eid, a member of the Reefnet project in the Syrian Arab Republic, demonstrated the way in which the portal operates and how knowledge is exchanged through its forums.
32. Mr. Mamduh Hamdi from the Salhia Knowledge Station in Jordan showcased the Jordanian Knowledge Stations portal, which facilitates knowledge sharing between 160 participating telecentres.
33. A solution to the overabundance of portals and the fact that telecentres have to update information in several locations was also debated. The Salamieh telecentre in the Syrian Arab Republic, which is a member of telecentre.org, the KN4DC project and the Reefnet programme, was given as an illustration of the problem. However, the situation can also be viewed conversely as a diversity of portals, each unique in content, audience and services.

## H. SUSTAINABILITY MODELS

34. The major preoccupation of the telecentre leaders participating in the forum was the sustainability of such centres. Three presentations were given on the subject, highlighting successful sustainability models. A link to each of these presentations can be found in annex II.
35. Mr. Noureldine Cheikh Obeid defined three types of sustainability: administrative, activity and financial, and explained that they can be attained through:
- (a) Offering a wider array of activities and services;
  - (b) Contracting with governmental and non-governmental entities for capacity-building;
  - (c) Making telecentre meeting rooms available for conferences and meetings;
  - (d) Recruiting volunteers;
  - (e) Seeking donors;
  - (f) Cooperating with other telecentres and forming networks of financial and operational synergies.
36. Mr. Nasser Khalaf, Director General of the Jordanian National Information Technology Center, presented a summary of a study on the measurement, evaluation and sustainability of the Jordanian knowledge stations, with particular emphasis on the section relating to the sustainability, self-sufficiency and financial independence of telecentres. He also explained that sustainability may be attained through the establishment of basic and advanced services in the areas of development, diversification of programmes and services, job satisfaction, marketing and administration.
37. Similarly, Mr. Karim Kasim used the IT Clubs in Egypt as a reference model to show how multidimensional sustainability can be achieved and stressed that the three main pillars of sustainability are human resources, finance and services.

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<sup>8</sup> KN4DC ([www.knowledgenets.net](http://www.knowledgenets.net)), telecentre.org ([www.telecentre.org](http://www.telecentre.org)), Knowledge Stations (Jordan) ([www.ks.gov.jo](http://www.ks.gov.jo)) and Reefnet (Syrian Arab Republic) ([www.reefnet.gov.sy](http://www.reefnet.gov.sy)).

## I. THE WAY AHEAD

38. This workshop marked the beginning of a new phase in networking between 30 telecentres in the Arab Mashreq. Using a variety of approaches, telecentre leaders learned the benefits of exchanging knowledge with other telecentres in the region.

39. On the afternoon of the second day, participants were divided into four groups, (Lebanon and Palestine; the Syrian Arab Republic; Jordan; Egypt, the Sudan and Yemen) for an exercise aimed at identifying ways to enhance telecentre performance.

40. The groups identified activities to be carried out in the coming few months, including the following:

(a) Creating a group on telecentre.org which workshop participants can use to communicate and exchange knowledge;

(b) Communicating regularly, using the various forums and platforms available;

(c) Summarizing the outcome of the workshop and posting it on the portals;

(d) Concentrating on networking through the use of portals, forums and e-mail;

(e) Elaborating the proposal of a helpdesk for every portal;

(f) Finding donors and funding entities;

(g) Benefiting from the experience of other telecentres;

(h) Identifying a coordinating body for telecentres in countries that do not currently have one, namely Lebanon and Palestine;

(i) Developing and activating multimedia marketing;

(j) Creating a Facebook<sup>9</sup> group for telecentres in the region;

(k) Disseminating the information learned in the workshop to non-participating telecentres.

41. The organizers of the forum (ESCWA, EITF, WJAR and UNDP Egypt) presented their thoughts on the way ahead, reminding participants of the necessity of keeping communication channels open in order to achieve the goals discussed in the workshop, while paying particular attention to sustainability.

42. Mr. Farah explained that the KN4DC project is reaching its final stages and that ESCWA support for the project will end by mid-2010. He stressed that it was essential for all telecentres to interact with each other and to exchange information, so as not to lose the momentum that ESCWA has created, both in this forum and in previous events. He also suggested that a secretariat should be established for the project, in order to supply consistent information to the regional portal and provide support for participating telecentres.

## J. EVALUATION AND CLOSING REMARKS

43. Feedback from participants was excellent. A high percentage thought that the substantive part of the forum was closely related to the line of work undertaken in telecentres. Participants also stated that their expectations were met to a large extent and that the forum had enabled them to network with colleagues from their home country and from other countries in the region more effectively. The only negative comment of note (which could also be seen as a compliment to the quality and effectiveness of the forum) was that 70 per cent of participants felt that the duration of the forum was too short.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com).



44. The organizers of the meeting used the closing session to urge participants to use the tools made available by ICT, in particular the Internet, to exchange information and knowledge, and, on return to their telecentres, to put into operation the suggestions identified during the forum, in particular those relating to the achievement of sustainability.

## II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A. VENUE AND DATE

45. The Telecentres Leaders Forum – Arab Mashreq Region was held on 15 and 16 July 2009 at the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, Amman, Jordan. It was organized by ESCWA, WLAR, EITF, telecentre.org and IDRC, and was hosted by the Jordanian Ministry of Information and Communications Technology.

### B. OPENING

46. The meeting was inaugurated by His Excellency Basem Al Rousan, the Jordanian Minister of ICT. He welcomed the participants to Jordan and to the workshop, and highlighted Jordanian interest in increasing knowledge sharing among telecentres. The organizers of the forum, represented by Mr. Mansour Farah (ESCWA), Ms. Reem Bsiso (WLAR), Mr. Karim Kasim (telecentre.org), Ms. Hoda Dahroug (EITF) and Mr. Sherif Al Tokali (UNDP Egypt), also welcomed the participants to the workshop, thanked the ministry for hosting the event and briefly discussed the importance of sharing experiences between telecentres in the region.

47. Mr. Farah reaffirmed the statement of the World Summit on the Information Society on the need to build a comprehensive information society that provides an opportunity for all people to access ICT and use it to increase the socio-economic development of communities.

### C. PARTICIPANTS

48. The workshop was attended by 45 participants, primarily telecentre managers and trainers from seven ESCWA member countries, namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The list of participants is contained in annex I of this report.

### D. AGENDA

49. The agenda of the two-day workshop was as follows:

- (a) Opening statement;
- (b) Project overview;
- (c) Expectations of telecentre leaders from the forum;
- (d) Challenges facing telecentres in the region;
- (e) Presentations from selected telecentres;
- (f) Telecentre souk;
- (g) Web portals for telecentres in the region;
- (h) Sustainability models;
- (i) The way ahead;
- (j) Evaluation and closing remarks.

### E. DOCUMENTS

50. A list of the documents submitted to the workshop is contained in annex II of this report, and is available on the ESCWA website at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1052E>.

## Annex I

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## Annex II

### **LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

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<u>Title</u>
Knowledge stations and people with special needs (in Arabic) <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/JibrilAlSaoudi-KSandspecialneeds.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/JibrilAlSaoudi-KSandspecialneeds.pdf</a>
telecentre.org – a platform for collaboration and cooperation <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ictd/1052/karimkasem-sustainability.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ictd/1052/karimkasem-sustainability.pdf</a>
Deir Youssef Knowledge Station (in Arabic) <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/KholaOmri-KSandwomen.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/KholaOmri-KSandwomen.pdf</a>
Knowledge networks through ICT access points in disadvantaged areas <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/MansourFarah-KN4DC.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/MansourFarah-KN4DC.pdf</a>
ESCWA regional knowledge portal <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/MarcKhayat-KN4DCportal.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/MarcKhayat-KN4DCportal.pdf</a>
Telecentres and disabilities <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NabilEid-ICTforDevDisabilities.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NabilEid-ICTforDevDisabilities.pdf</a>
Princess Basma Youth Resource Centre <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/Suha_Syouf-Princess_Basma_Centre.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/Suha_Syouf-Princess_Basma_Centre.pdf</a>
Measuring, evaluating and sustaining knowledge stations in local communities (in Arabic) <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NasserKhalaf-Sustainability.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NasserKhalaf-Sustainability.pdf</a>
Knowledge stations programme (in Arabic) <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NasserKhalaf-KS.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NasserKhalaf-KS.pdf</a>
Access centres, telecentres and knowledge hubs sustainability (in Arabic) <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NourObeid-Sustainability.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NourObeid-Sustainability.pdf</a>
Access points and increasing their contributions for the development of local communities (in Arabic) <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NourObeid-Transformation.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/NourObeid-Transformation.pdf</a>
The role of community telecentres in helping citizens help themselves <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/SherifEl-Tokali-Telcentres.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/SherifEl-Tokali-Telcentres.pdf</a>
Opening speech of Mansour Farah (in Arabic) <a href="http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/SpeechMF.pdf">http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1052/SpeechMF.pdf</a>

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