

Opening Remarks at the

**Red GEALC Workshop:
Sharing Canadian e-Government Experiences**

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Buenos días y bienvenidos al taller de Gobierno Electrónico de la Red GEALC [*pronounced HEY ALC*]. Quiero dar la bienvenida a Canadá a todos los delegados de América Latina y el Caribe. Good morning and welcome to the Red GEALC Workshop on e-Government. I would like to extend a special welcome to all the delegates from Latin America and the Caribbean. Mesdames et Messieurs, bienvenue au CRDI. C'est avec un immense plaisir que nous vous accueillons aujourd'hui.

My name is Maureen O'Neil, and as the President of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), it is my pleasure to welcome our international guests to Canada and our Canadian colleagues to IDRC to participate in the ***Red GEALC Workshop: Sharing e-Government Experiences***. Organized by the Organization of American States and the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas with the collaboration of the Government of Canada, this workshop seeks to capture our evolving vision as well as lessons we have learned, and to identify benchmarks.

IDRC is proud to be hosting this important workshop. E-Government remains at the forefront of the agendas of most governments of the Western hemisphere. We are all investing great resources in e-Government strategies and it is crucial that we learn from each other's experiences. Information distribution and dissemination through ICTs increases citizen participation and has a positive impact on democracy, but we must overcome barriers such as digital exclusion, computer illiteracy, and low levels of Internet access.

Red Gealc [*hey alc*] was created as a space to exchange expertise, knowledge, and solutions regarding all e-Government issues through horizontal cooperation among members. The Network now includes more than 40 government leaders from 31 countries in Latin American and the Caribbean. Red Gealc has already carried out three e-Government Best Practices workshops in Chile, Peru, and Brazil.

This week, Canadians will be sharing their experience concerning on-line federal services and information. While we know that no experience fits all, the Canadian government is a pioneer in offering on-line transactions, services, and information to its citizens. The

next three days will be very valuable for the exchange of expertise, knowledge and e-Government solutions and their effects on efficiency, transparency and citizen participation. Red Gealc participants from 31 countries will be sharing initiatives and best practices from their respective countries with these three pillars in mind: eficacia, transparencia y participación ciudadana — efficiency, transparency and citizen participation.

IDRC is one of the world's leading institutions in the generation and application of new knowledge to meet the challenges facing developing countries. IDRC funds applied research by researchers from developing countries on the problems they identify as crucial to their communities. We were one of the first agencies to support research on the transformational powers of new information and communication technologies as a means to foster development. In fact, through our ICT4D program, Telecentre.org, and the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas, we have been working to bridge the digital divide. E-Government is an expression of that work.

IDRC has also proven to be a useful vehicle for the Government of Canada to support its agenda for promoting greater access to information and technologies for development. We have seen great progress and potential in the past few years in the use of new technologies to help lay foundations for democracy and good governance. The past few years have seen many innovations in the on-line delivery of government services and information. Governments are just starting to tap the potential of getting on-line. We need a co-ordinated, forward-looking approach to ensure that governments work consistently and collaboratively for peace and development.

Undeniably, public sector modernization could also spark socioeconomic progress in Latin America and the Caribbean. I hope that this workshop will provide useful knowledge on what Canada has learned from the e-Government approach implemented in this country. And most importantly, that the next few days are useful as a means to consolidate and extend the existing consensus in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the strategic priorities for e-Government. I hope that, after three days of intensive work, you will all be in a better position to delineate how, through Red Gealc and the OAS, an action plan could be implemented to promote e-Government in the region.

I offer you all my best wishes for a productive and successful workshop. Encore, bienvenue à tous et à toutes. Muchas gracias.