HE Dr. Talal Abu Ghazaleh, Chairman of ASREN.

"Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in the first International Platform for Integrating Arab e-Infrastructure in a Global Environment, and welcome you to Jordan.

It is quite fulfilling to me that we are elevating the level of discussion as it relates to providing people with access to knowledge and information. In this time and age, the fundamental role of e-infrastructure as an enabler of growth and development has become undisputed.

Taking that further to exploring the power and value of a collective and integrated Arab World e-infrastructure is timely, indeed! And I would like to congratulate the Arab States Research and Education Network on organizing this Forum.

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to take a few minutes to talk about Jordan's e-infrastructure experience before I briefly get into the value of integration. In 2003, the Jordan government started building the National Broadband Network aimed at connecting all public schools and universities to implement His Majesty King Abullah II's vision to translate Jordan into a full-fledged knowledge economy.

By 2007, the scope of the programme has evolved to add all government agencies, healthcare centres, and hospitals. Connected schools in rural areas are to be used as distribution points for providing last mile internet connectivity. To date, 35% of the network has been completed at a cost of about $36 million.

However, like everybody else, we were hit hard by the financial crisis, and the NBN came to a temporary halt in 2008. We do not have the necessary financial resources, yet not completing the network will seriously harm our competitiveness as a nation, and violate our people's right to effectively access knowledge and benefit from its unlimited potential. That potential encompasses the content and applications that are made possible by the high bandwidth that

broadband offer and covers e-health, e-commerce, e-learning, e-services, and gaming, among other things.

An example that is relevant to us in Jordan is in healthcare. Powered by our broadband network, specialists in leading hospitals can diagnose patients in rural areas, remotely, using what you may know as Telemedicine or Telepresence requiring speeds of 20-30 Mb/s at least.

This is quite something considering that there is an estimated global shortage of almost 4.3 million medical staff mostly in the poorest countries. So, new trends and possibilities are emerging, value chains are being re-configured, business models restructured, and most importantly, new revenue streams created.

The private sector took notice.

And now, we are building on Jordan's proven Public Private Partnership track record. We are currently exploring a number of options with the private sector and hope to reach an innovative and win-win arrangement that will see the NBN through, soon. Now, turning to integrating the e-infrastructure of the Arab world

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Integration in the ICT space is often synonymous with "exponential".

The integrative nature of the internet resulted in Facebook's exponential growth in subscribers in the MENA region from 14.8 million in April 2010 to 27.7 million in April 2011. An 84% increase over one year.

Additionally, many observers credit social networking as a main enabler of the Arabic Spring. An exponential 5-10 fold increase of Jordan's bandwidth availability will be the result of the Regional Cable System that was proposed by Jordan three years ago.

The system will see private telecom operators in UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey, integrate their existing infrastructure and a relevant example to today's forum is in scientific research. Leveraging thousands of brilliant minds to work collectively through online networks towards identifying innovative solutions to real problems is at the very heart of exponential and of course there is always the potential of cloud computing to consider.

The World Bank summed it best. According to a study they conducted in 2009, they concluded that for every 10 percentage points increase in broadband penetration, GDP growth will be boosted by an additional 1.38 additional percentage points in developing countries   Again, exponential!

Now, we should pause and consider the very low broadband penetration in the MENA region compared to the rest of the world.
According to recent research, the total broadband subscriptions were only 16.2 million between fixed and mobile by end of Q1 2011.

That can be better conceptualized when we consider that the average internet usage per user per month in the Middle East was the lowest among major world regions aside from Africa.
In fact, although it is projected that average will more than quadruple by 2015 to reach 10.6GB, the Middle East will account for only about 1% of global internet traffic.
That is 1% for a nation that has the resources and potential to play a key and leading role in the world today!

To that end, Jordan will soon make a recommendation the Arab League to develop a pan-Arab intranet that will be self-contained in our region, and will ensure we are all connected among ourselves, even if we lost connectivity top the rest of the world.

Last but not least,
Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,
In addition to working towards integrating e-infrastructure in the Arab World, it is also critical that we advance the build and reach of broadband networks.
Its impact on productivity, competitiveness, poverty alleviation, social inclusion, general health, and universal access is too large to ignore.
I trust, conferences like this one, are a very important first step to achieving that.
Thank you and I look forward to hearing about your findings".