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PROPOSED THEMES FOR THE SUMMIT AND POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

1. By UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December, 2001)¹, the international community has decided to hold a World Summit on the Information Society. The Summit will be held in two phases, in Geneva, 10-12 December, 2003 and in Tunis in 2005.
2. The Resolution recommends that an open-ended intergovernmental preparatory committee should define the agenda of the Summit. It is important that this process be a transparent one, in which all stakeholders feel they have an adequate opportunity to contribute.

1. A draft agenda of themes

3. In order to assist the PrepCom in its work in determining possible themes for the agenda, the High-Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) has defined a list of possible topics. These are listed below:

- **Building the infrastructure**
- **Opening the gates**
- **Services and applications**
- **The needs of users**
- **Developing a framework**
- **ICTs and Education**
- **The role of ICTs in good governance**

¹ UN General Assembly Resolution, A/RES/56/183, is available at:
<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/56/a56r183.pdf>. The original idea for the Summit came from ITU Resolution 73 (Minneapolis, 1998) and was subsequently confirmed in ITU Council Resolutions 1158 and 1179. The UNGA Resolution invites the ITU to take the “leading managerial role” in the Executive Secretariat.

4. These topics are further elaborated in Annex 1 to this document. This extended list builds upon the themes originally proposed for inclusion in the Summit by HLSOC members, subsequent discussion and inputs from a workshop organized by the host country for the first phase, Switzerland, at Coppet (December, 2001) and ongoing work in the Executive Secretariat.

2. The key issues

5. Technologies to create, process and disseminate information are used in most areas of modern society. Thus it is to be expected that the information society will have many dimensions, for instance in business, government, health, education and so on². It is important that the scope of the Summit be comprehensive and, in the words of the UNGA Resolution, that it addresses “the whole range of relevant issues related to the information society”. Some of these issues may be treated in side-meetings during the Summit.

6. However, it is important that the subjects addressed by the Summit in Plenary be sufficiently focused to attract the attention of policy-makers and political leaders at the highest level, and to ensure that the Summit is action-oriented and practical. PrepCom needs to determine what the issues are that the Summit is aiming to tackle.

7. While there are many issues associated with the dawning of the information society, the themes proposed for the Summit can be clustered into three main concerns: vision, access and applications (see Annex 1).

- A. **Vision:** What are the shared elements among members of the international community upon which a common vision of the information society can be built? What framework and strategy can the international community develop to ensure that the possible benefits of ICTs for development are maximized while the possible obstacles and barriers are minimized? What steps can be taken to reduce or eliminate impediments to cross-border electronic commerce and to improve the security of critical network infrastructures?
- B. **Access:** How can the benefits of ubiquitous and affordable ICTs be extended to all the world's inhabitants? What mechanism needs to be put into place to help narrow the digital divide? What policies will assist users?
- C. **Applications:** How can ICTs be leveraged to help promote the common goals of humanity, such as those expressed in the UN Millennium Declaration?

3. Possible Summit outcomes

8. The UNGA Resolution recommends that, based on the shared vision developed during the PrepComs, the Summit may adopt a **Declaration of Principles** on the fundamentals of the Information Society of the 21st century. ITU Resolution 73 refers to establishing an overall framework identifying, with the contribution of all partners, a joint and harmonized understanding of the information society.

9. The UNGA Resolution further recommends that, based on the work of PrepCom, the Summit may adopt a **Plan of Action**. ITU Resolution 73 calls for the drawing up of a strategic plan of action, for concerted development of the information society by defining an agenda covering the objectives to be achieved and the resources to be mobilized.

² See, for instance, the discussion in the UNESCO World Communication and Information Report, 1999-2000, available at: <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/wcir/en/report.html>.

10. This Plan of Action would be the expression of a consensus among governments, the private sector, civil society and other major stakeholders on the roadmap for the way ahead. It should contain concrete goals and objectives, for instance on the elimination of bottlenecks hampering the bridging of the digital divide. It should also contain measurable steps (milestones/benchmarks) for monitoring and evaluation. One of the strengths of this Summit lies in the fact that it will be held in two phases, in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. The second phase will provide an ideal opportunity to assess the effectiveness of this action plan, and to make further refinements as required.

11. The Summit should also decide on an appropriate division of tasks among the different stakeholders so as to ensure effective follow-up, especially on the Plan of Action. ITU Resolution 73 talks of identifying the roles of the various partners to ensure smooth coordination of the establishment in practice of the information society.

12. In order to achieve these expected outcomes, it is proposed to structure the discussions around those objectives that are highlighted in the UNGA Resolution, specifically:

- A. **Vision: “To develop a common vision and understanding of the information society”.** This corresponds to the themes “opening the gates” and “developing a framework”
- B. **Access: “To promote the urgently needed access of all the world’s inhabitants to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development”.** This corresponds to the themes “building the infrastructure” and “the needs of users”.
- C. **Applications: “To harness the potential of knowledge and technology for promoting the goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration”.** This corresponds to the themes “services and applications” and “ICTs and education”.

These are discussed in more detail below.

A. To develop a common vision and understanding of the information society

13. The purpose of the World Summit on the Information Society, as stated in the Resolution, is to develop a “*common vision and understanding of the information society and the adoption of a declaration and plan of action for implementation by Governments, international institutions and all sectors of civil society*”.

14. We live in an Information Society and access to information lies at the heart of most human activity. Skills in information-handling are required in most jobs in modern societies and access to information is seen as a route to wealth and power. Since the 19th century, it has been possible to send messages, in electronic form, from one part of the globe to another. Now, in the 21st century, volumes of information equivalent to the contents of every book ever printed can be sent from one place to another in a matter of seconds, and billions of web pages are waiting to be read. Trillions of US Dollars worth of financial transactions are transferred around the world each day, in digital 1s and 0s.

15. But the sheer quantity of information available should not mask the fact that access to information, and the means to use it, is unequally shared. Extremes of wealth and poverty are just as stark in the world of information as in the world of goods and services. Information poverty is a fact of life for many of the world’s citizens. Information about goods and services makes markets work and brings new ones within the reach of local producers. Information about diseases, their

prevention, and associated remedies is the key to health care. Information about the world in which we live enables learning to take place. Information allows good governance to occur and improves the delivery of government services. The fear is that, as more and more of human activity becomes directly dependent on access to information, inequalities in access will make other development gaps even harder to bridge. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) enable us to create and extract economic value from information. Without access to ICTs, the poor will get poorer.

16. In this part of the agenda, it is anticipated that participants will seek to gain consensus on a framework for the basic principles upon which a common vision should be based. This may be used as the basis for drafting the declaration of principles, to be adopted by the Summit.

B. To promote the urgently needed access of all the world's inhabitants to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development

17. The UN Millennium Declaration includes a specific commitment to ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially ICTs, are available to all. Access to information, and thereby to the creation of knowledge, is considered a critical factor in the development process. On the one hand, this requires an adequate range of ICT networks and services. On the other hand, it implies the ability to use those tools to develop applications that benefit society (learning by doing). But both the tools and the ability to use them are unevenly distributed.

18. Despite considerable progress in recent years, access to ICTs, notably the telephone, mobilephone, Internet and broadcast networks, remains unequally distributed³. There are, for example, more televisions in Brazil; more fixed line telephones in Italy; more mobilephones in Korea; and greater Internet connectivity in Luxembourg; than in the whole continent of Africa. Yet the population of Africa, and the needs of its people, greatly exceeds those of these other countries.

19. In recent years, these disparities have come to be known as the “digital divide”. In this part of the agenda, it will be possible to reflect on the scale of the divide and the multiple causes of it. But beyond this, the Summit will provide an opportunity to evaluate those success stories that have allowed an increasing number of developing countries to develop world-class ICT networks and services. For many, the route to success has involved a combination of private sector participation, market liberalization and the creation of independent regulatory agencies. It is anticipated that country case studies, designed to illustrate best practice examples, will provide an important input to the work of the Summit.

20. In passing the Resolution, UN Members States declared themselves to be *convinced of the need, at the highest political level, to marshal the global consensus and commitment required to promote the urgently needed access of all countries to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development so as to reap the full benefits of the information and communication technologies revolution*. Under this part of the agenda, the global consensus and commitment needs to be converted into a plan of action. This would be geared towards converting the digital divide into a digital opportunity.

C. To harness the potential of knowledge and technology for promoting the goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration

21. The Resolution 56/183 recognises the *urgent need to harness the potential of knowledge and technology for promoting the goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration and to find effective and innovative ways to put this potential at the service of development for all*.

³ See, for instance, the data and analysis on the ITU website at: <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/>.

22. The UN Millennium Summit, in 2000, defined a set of goals to be achieved for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. That Declaration contains a commitment to “*ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies ... are available to all*”. While access to ICTs can educate, entertain and enrich our lives, ICTs, together with other tools, can also play a part in helping to achieve the much broader goals of the Millennium Declaration⁴. The Millennium Declaration goals can be divided into four sub-themes that may help structure the plan of action, which will be developed at the Summit:

C1. Development and poverty eradication

23. Few people have ever died because they did not have access to the Internet or could not make a telephone call. Among the necessities of life, ICTs come well down the scale. But it is much easier to deliver the real necessities of life—such as clean water, nourishing food, shelter, education, healthcare, and employment—with good access to information and communications. The Millennium Declaration contains commitments to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world’s population living on less than one US dollar per day, suffering from hunger or having no access to drinking water. It also contains commitments on achieving universal primary education for both boys and girls, reducing maternal and child mortality, improving healthcare and achieving significant improvements in the life of slum dwellers. ICTs can help in achieving all of these goals. An illustration of this is provided in Annex 2 to this document.

C2. Democracy and governance

24. The Millennium Declaration commits governments to the rule of law, while respecting internationally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also contains a commitment to ensuring the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information. ICTs can play a significant role in the creation of good governance models, through improving access to government processes and connecting citizens. It is through ICTs that hitherto marginalized voices will be heard. ICT development encourages government activities to be increasingly accountable and transparent. ICTs can also assist in empowering disadvantaged populations to overcome difficulties through community networking and knowledge sharing.

C3. Our common heritage

25. The Millennium Declaration makes a commitment to protect all humanity, and especially future generations, from living on a planet irredeemably spoilt by human activities or where resources are no longer sufficient for needs. ICTs today play a central role in the global fight to reduce pollution while increasing environmentally-friendly economic development. Cultural and linguistic diversity is also an important part of our common heritage and, like the physical environment, is worthy of being cherished and protected. ICTs provide new channels for the expression of this diversity and for the worldwide dissemination of locally created content.

C4. Protecting the vulnerable and meeting the special needs of Africa

26. The Millennium Declaration acknowledges the special problems experienced by the vulnerable communities, such as the Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States and landlocked countries. It recognises the need to bring Africa into the mainstream of the world

⁴ The text of the Millennium Declaration is available at:
<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>.

economy. Vulnerable communities are even more dependent than others on ICTs because of their physical isolation. While the digital divide has been narrowing for middle-income developing countries, it has actually been widening for the very poorest countries, especially in terms of connectivity to the international Internet backbone. The Summit can help to focus world attention on these problems.

4. Proposed process for setting the agenda and developing content

27. The UNGA Resolution *recommends that the preparations for the Summit take place through an open-ended intergovernmental preparatory committee*. It also encourages effective contributions from, and active participation of, a wide range of bodies including UN agencies and other inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector.

28. In order to ensure that the process is transparent, a number of steps have already been taken:

- In the first instance, the establishment of the High Level Summit Organizing Committee created a basis for contributions to the themes of the Summit from the international United Nations family. All the members of the HLSOC have engaged to provide specific information about their work that will help develop the Summit themes. These contributions will be posted on the WSIS website and will be summarized in a separate document to PrepCom 1.
- To ensure an open process for contributions to the Summit agenda, an Executive Secretariat (ES) was established using facilities provided at the International Telecommunication Union, Geneva. The ES has a mandate, *inter alia*, to “prepare draft agendas and draft documents for the PrepComs”. The composition of the Executive Secretariat is intended to facilitate contributions from major stakeholder groups including staff from Member States, staff from the UN specialized agencies participating in the HLSOC, staff from the private sector and staff from civil society.
- Another major step in developing the agenda and themes of the Summit involves a consultation process with governments, ahead of PrepCom 1, through informal consultations with the Missions in Geneva. Consultations with other stakeholder groups will also make a contribution to the development of the Summit themes.
- As part of the ongoing process of consultations, a number of regional conferences and thematic meetings have been held or are being prepared to enable stakeholders to focus on the issues that will be discussed at the Summit.

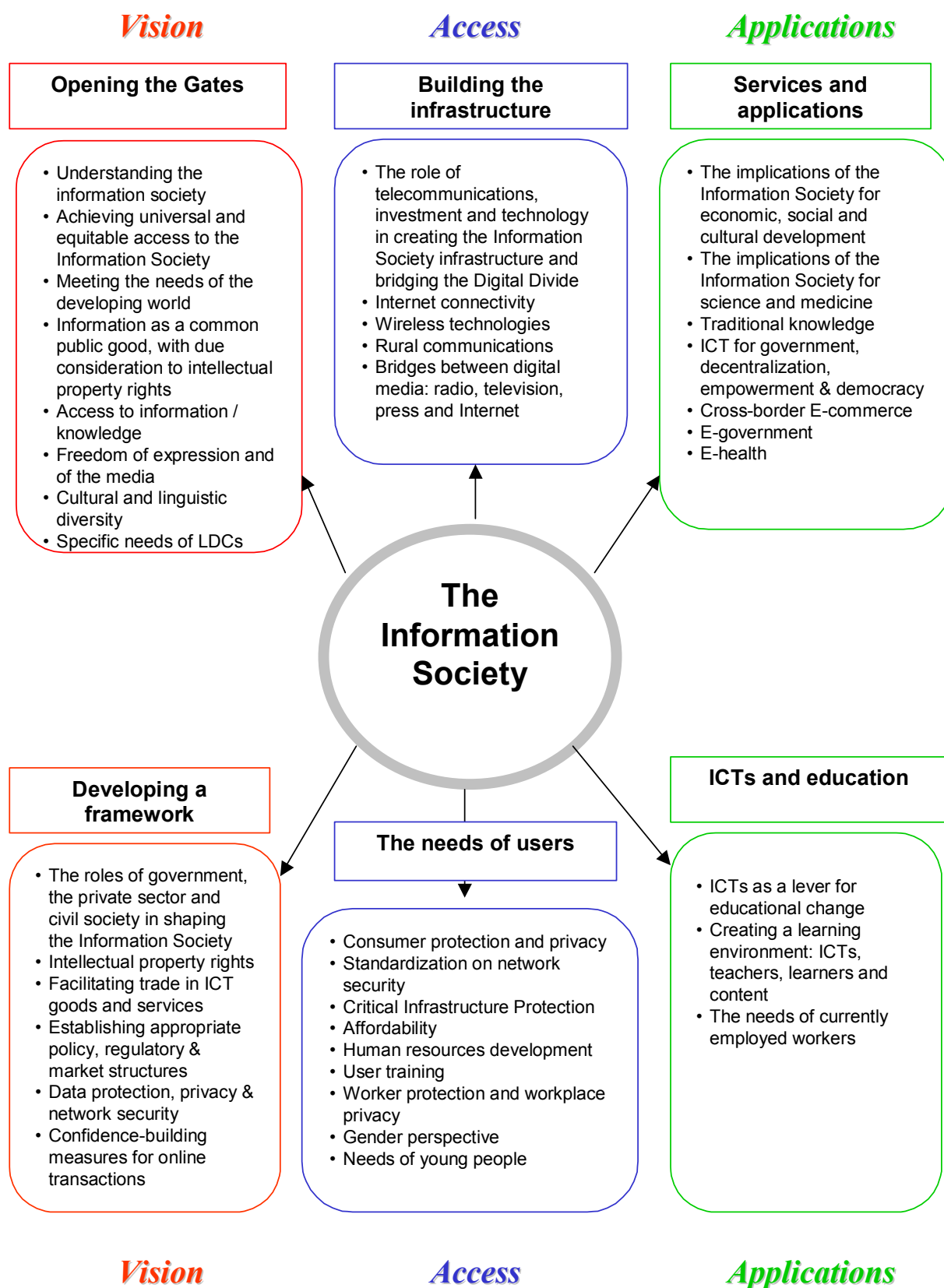
29. It is important that the government stakeholders, who are at the centre of the Summit intergovernmental process, have an opportunity not only to state their views but also to receive input from other stakeholders in ways that allow diverse views from different sources to be taken into account. The PrepCom may wish to take into account the important work done by the G-8 DOT force, the UN ICT Task Force, the Digital Opportunity Initiative, and many other related initiatives, as well as work carried out at major international meetings, such as the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference and Plenipotentiary Conference in 2002. The PrepCom should also consider work carried out by public and private foundations, associations and international inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations.

30. The central requirement for setting the agenda and determining the possible themes for the Summit is that the process be transparent and clearly established. It is intended that PrepCom 1 engage in a first discussion of the themes and agenda of the Summit. Following PrepCom 1, regional conferences organized by governments and thematic meetings will be held to produce additional views on the themes, agenda and output, including regional perspectives. These inputs,

consisting largely of the views of governments, will then be channeled into PrepCom 2, which is tentatively set for **24 March through 4 April 2003 in Geneva**. In addition, the second PrepCom will also be an opportunity for the UN agencies, and other stakeholders to provide written contributions that can be considered by that meeting in developing the themes, agenda and output. The third PrepCom, in the third quarter of 2003, will provide further opportunity to refine and focus the themes, agenda and output, leading to the first phase of the Summit in Geneva in December 2003.

31. For the sake of transparency and inclusiveness, other avenues can be explored to allow a wider audience to offer its views on the key issues of the Summit and to be informed. It is proposed therefore that the WSIS website be used not only for posting this document, but also for posting comments and responses to it. For that reason, comments should be sent to the WSIS Secretariat, if possible in electronic format, to: inputs-wsis@itu.int. All comments will be posted on the public website unless the contributor specifically requests otherwise. In addition, the input documents submitted from HLSOC members, and the outputs from regional conferences and from thematic meetings will also be posted on the website.

Annex 1: An illustration of the range of issues that may be relevant to the Information Society



Annex 2: How information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help achieve broader development objectives, such as the Millennium Declaration Goals (MDGs)

Target	Role of ICTs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half between 1990 and 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to market information and reduce transaction costs for poor farmers and traders • Increase efficiency, competitiveness and market access of developing country firms • Enhance ability of developing countries to participate in global economy and to exploit comparative advantage in factor costs (particularly skilled labour)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce infant and child mortality rates by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015 • Reduce maternal mortality rates by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015 • Provide access to basic health services for all by 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance delivery of basic and in-service training for health workers • Increase monitoring and information-sharing on disease and famine • Increase access of rural care-givers to specialist support and remote diagnosis • Increase access to basic health information, including on reproductive health care and AIDS prevention, through locally-appropriate content in local languages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement national strategies for sustainable development by 2005 so as to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote sensing technologies and communications networks permit more effective monitoring, resource management, mitigation of environmental risks • Increase access to/awareness of sustainable development strategies, in areas such as agriculture, sanitation and water management, mining, etc. • Greater transparency and monitoring of environmental abuses/enforcement of environmental regulations • Facilitate knowledge exchange and networking among policy makers, practitioners and advocacy groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enroll all children in primary schools by 2015 • Make progress toward gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase supply of trained teachers through ICT-enhanced and distance training of teachers and networks that link teachers to their colleagues • Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education ministries and related bodies through strategic application of technologies and ICT-enabled skill development • Broaden availability of quality educational materials/resources through ICTs • Deliver educational and literacy programmes specifically targeted to poor girls & women using appropriate technologies • Influence public opinion on gender equality through information/communication programmes using a range of ICTs

Source: ITU *World Telecommunication Development Report 2002: Reinventing Telecoms*, adapted from United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). *The significance of information and communication technologies for reducing poverty*. January 2002.