

---

**Document WSIS/PC-2/CONTR/85-E**  
**13 February 2003**  
**Original: English**

**TELECOMMUNICATION INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (TIT)**  
**ITU-SECTOR MEMBER**

**ARAB BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

**Contribution to the work of WSIS-PrepCom2**

**"THE ARAB BUSINESS COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE FOR**  
**THE GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY AND FOR THE WSIS"**

**PREAMBLE**

The decision taken further the adoption of UN **Res.56/183** to hold the *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)* in two successive phases with the second phase on 2005 in Tunis has represented indeed a great and fair reward for the efforts engaged by the Arab administrations since the proposal they have submitted in this regard to the ITU-Plenipotentiary Conference (PP-98, Minneapolis) for the holding of such a Summit.

The Arab world has suffered during the last century from number of conflicts and wars that have negatively impacted its economic and social development. It is presently facing huge threats and challenges that enforce the continuous "instability" in this region.

Despite such a difficult situation, the Arab world as a whole: governments and public administrations, public and private business entities, professional orders and corporations, NGOs and associations composing the Civil Society, individuals, is paying a great consideration to the importance of developing ICT activities noting that some Arab countries are still victims of unilateral regulatory decisions preventing their peoples from equitable access to IC technologies and services. There is no doubt that the Arab peoples are unanimously willing and ready to enter with force the 21<sup>st</sup> century *Global Information Society (GIS)* and to move fast towards the better future that this GIS is supposed to create.

The Arab world has expressed at many occasions that it intends to make this major move, while preserving and even enforcing in one hand its cultural, religious and linguistic patrimony of which it is legitimately proud and in the other hand, while taking its full and entire part of the task put on the international community to build the Global Information Society. This is the spirit under which the Arab world is going to participate in the WSIS.

## **THE ARAB PREPARATORY WORK FOR WSIS AND THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ARAB BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

### **The WSIS-African Regional preparatory conference (Bamako, May 2002) and the Western Asia WSIS-preparatory conference (Beirut, February 2003)**

Number of Arab administrations and stakeholders have participated in the *WSIS-African Regional preparatory conference (Bamako, May 2002)* where the *Bamako Declaration* has been adopted and number of other Arab administrations and stakeholders have participated in the *Western Asia WSIS-preparatory conference (Beirut, February 2003)* where the *Beirut Declaration* has been adopted and the *Beirut Initiative* launched by the ESCWA warmly welcomed. In addition to these preparatory conferences, number of relevant initiatives and actions related to the WSIS have been engaged here and there involving Arab entities. In total, a general feeling has emerged that the Arab contribution to the Summit shall certainly be of a great interest for the Arab world in one hand and in the other hand, shall help the Summit itself in taking appropriate decisions and in reaching its basic objectives.

### **The Arab Working Group for WSIS, the Arab IT Forum and the Arab Business Community**

The Arab administrations have undertaken, under the auspices of the League of Arab States, an important preparatory work for the WSIS, implemented by the *Arab Working Group for WSIS*. In this Arab preparatory work, the private sector is participating actively, represented by the *Arab IT Business Forum* which is the body that the League of Arab States has officially recognized as representing the *Arab Business Community* entities working in the field of ICT including public as well as private business entities. The Arab Business Community intends certainly to contribute to the success of the *WSIS Arab Regional preparatory conference (Cairo, 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, June 2003)* that is going to be the crucial step of the Arab contributory work for the WSIS before the Summit itself and to support the work undertaken by administrations by providing them with number of inputs, recommendations and proposals.

### **The Arab Digital Initiative (ADI)**

In parallel, the Arab Business Community, with the support of the *International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)*, has started to mobilize for the Summit itself announcing during PrepCom1 the launching of the "*Arab Digital Initiative*" (Refer to Annex1: THE ARAB DIGITAL INITIATIVE (ADI)) with the objective to bring into the Summit, beside the 22 Arab governmental delegations, representatives of thousands of Arab public as well as of private entities that compose together the Arab Business Community.

In the present contribution, the Arab Business Community would like to express its views and opinions, leaving them to the consideration of the governmental delegations attending WSIS-PrepCom2, with regard to:

- What could be the worldwide vision of ~~the~~the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Global Information Society
- What are the objectives that the Arab world should target while entering this Global Information Society and what is required from administrations, business entities and Civil Society entities in order to reach these objectives and to ensure the future development of ICT activities in the Arab world
- The decisions and action-plan that PrepCom2 and at a further stage the Summit itself should adopt in order to allow the Arab world to reach its objectives related t the Global Information Society

## THE WORLDWIDE VISION OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY

The Arab Business Community hopes that PrepCom2 agree on a draft-definition of the worldwide vision of the Global Information Society would take the form of a clear statement which comprises different commitments in order to require from the Summit itself to adopt this draft. The Arab Business Community is suggesting for this draft-definition the following wording:

"Building the Global Information Society would be possible only when each component of the whole world, State or Citizen, agrees to be committed in promoting the development of the Information and Communication technologies and services and using them:

- For the interests of all nations, most particularly, the interests of the developing countries noting that communication, forming as it does the basis of individual and societal existence, should be managed in a manner that secures the fair, balanced and harmonious development of all the peoples of the world with particular attention to the needs and aspirations of the most disadvantaged communities in each society such as: women, youth, inhabitants of remote or rural or desert areas, disabled persons
- While respecting, preserving and enforcing by all possible legal, technical and regulatory means the religious, cultural and linguistic identities of various peoples in our earth, accepting their diversity and generalizing behaviours based on the spirit of tolerance and freedom, noting that "globalization" has never implied and should not imply any kind of obligation for peoples of the world to follow a given multi-model whatsoever could be the positive aspects of this model
- While adopting a framework for international cooperation based on a spirit of real and sincere solidarity aiming to enable all countries of the world, in particular developing countries, to benefit from adequate means to achieve at a national basis, an harmonious social integration and economic development noting that such a result is the most important factor that could ensure to all peoples of the world security, peace and stability"

This draft-definition addresses the issue of bridging the Digital Divide existing inside each country (Bullet 1) as well as the issue of bridging the Digital Divide existing between poor countries and other countries (Bullet 3). It also answers the concerns raised in developing countries by anarchic and unregulated "globalization" as well as the concerns related to security, peace, stability and freedom (Bullet 2). Finally, it prepares the field for concrete development-oriented decisions that the Summit is supposed to take.

Such a strong commitment to share this vision implies on States as well as on Citizens series of rights and duties-obligations which no one can deny unless it or he intends to threaten the building of this Global Information Society.

## **THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ARAB WORLD FOR THE GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY AND THE RESPECTIVE ROLES OF ADMINISTRATIONS AND OF BUSINESS ENTITIES**

### **A- The objectives for the Arab world**

- Provide citizens of each Arab country with the means of using ICT services as a public service noting that a specific attention should be paid to categories of population that suffer from disadvantages such as: women, youth, older persons, inhabitants of remote or rural or desert areas, disabled and to categories with low revenues and incomes per capita (Universal and Equitable Access)
- Guarantee citizens of each Arab country a protected access to information in the worldwide public domain as part of their inalienable right to freely accessing the information constituting the heritage of mankind which is disseminated in all media including new multimedia systems
- Develop alphabetization programs as well as Long-Term programs aiming to create local content using Arabic language noting that these programs should be accorded high priority in terms of regional cooperation and public financing
- Use as much as possible the existing Arab Human Resources in ICT meaning Arabs who are working within the region and those who are working outside the region and adopt permanent programs aiming to enforce the potential of this Arab Human Resources in ICT
- Promote absolutely and increase as much as possible the level of Inter-Arab cooperation in the field of ICT

### **B- Principles for the action of administrations and business entities in the Arab world**

- All development actors such as public and private business entities, civil society organizations, more specifically small and medium size enterprises (SME), having a stake in the development of communications, should be fully involved in decision taken at the national level by administrations or regulators with regard to ICT activities.
- ~~• Every citizen should be guaranteed freedom of expression and protected access to information in the worldwide public domain as part of their inalienable right to freely accessing the information constituting the heritage of mankind which is disseminated in all media including new multimedia systems~~
- Technology supply and extension of using ICT services should be facilitated through:
  1. The removal of regulatory, political and financial obstacles to the development of communication facilities and tools so as to meet the specific needs of citizens in all circumstances
  2. The implementation of an operational-plan geared to the cultural and linguistic specificities of Arab countries in particular aiming to create and develop national or sub-regional knowledge-Arab Center aiming to promote high-technological creation, R&D in ICT using as far as possible the skills of various Arab citizens that are presently working out of their region

3. The development of data bases on experiences concerning the introduction of new technologies that address the needs of rural areas
  4. The promotion of open source software packages that extend the life of investment and user training noting that because they are provided free of charge, the implementation of open source software programs is done with minimum cost
  5. The use of voice and touch screen applications that enable a greater number of peoples to participate in the information society
  6. The adoption of standards and norms in particular for Internet standards and protocols, particularly those considered as language dependent that could be easily adapted to different user needs
- Investment and funding strategies should be pursued through assistance with content creation and widen-access with a particular emphasis on e-learning and on knowledge activities
  - Use of Arabic language should be facilitated and promoted while using Internet or for e-business transactions through creation of Arabic software and through integration of Arabic in the interface e-segment noting that cultural diversity is the driving force for the process of developing content for local and international use
  - The full participation of the civil society and the private sector should be elicited at all levels of local, national, regional and international decision making related to the Information sSociety. These should be pursued by:
    1. Forging new forms of partnership based on complementarities among the various categories of public, private sector and civil society stakeholders putting a great emphasis on public-private partnerships at a national level as well as at a sub-regional level
    2. Establishing and/or strengthening at the local, national, regional and international levels, institutions that will create greater coherence and achieve better synergy in developing the Information sSociety
  - Cooperation and collaboration should be enhanced through:
    1. Networking on best practices and experiences as a way of building the type of knowledge needed for the harmonious development of new technologies
    2. The development of applications and content suited to local needs
    3. The development of training plans that familiarize people with new technologies, their use and the legal framework of the information society
    4. The strengthening of decentralized cooperation as one way of leveraging the reduction of the digital divide
  - Institutional, human and administrative capacity should be strengthened at the local, national, regional and international levels in order to achieve greater complementarities among all initiatives being taken to build the information society.

- Open and fair debate should be instituted on the new institutional and regulatory arrangements being made to define the social, cultural, economic, technical and ethical challenges posed by the new information and communication technologies.
- All these principles and plans of action should be pursued within competent institutions so that the building of information society can be managed with the full participation of all the relevant stakeholders.

The Arab Business Community appeals the Arab countries to explore and facilitate as far as possible sub-regional partnerships in ICT involving public as well as private entities aiming to optimize the cost of access to ICT with the view to identifying the rules for organising the international connectivity market and the sharing of markets at the national and sub-regional levels.

The Arab Business Community expresses its hope that Arab countries would:

- Continue to contribute fully and actively into the preparation for both phases of WSIS, namely Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005 and decide to be represented for the Summit at the highest political level
- Adopt policies aiming to stimulate and manage efficiently the building of ICT infrastructures in order to provide universal access particularly in rural, remote and desert areas noting that the Universal and Equitable access should remain the responsibility of the Public National Operators until this access would have reach a satisfactory level
- Promote Public-Private partnerships at national level and especially at sub-regional level
- Consider the importance for the development of ICT activities in the Arab region of having pro-competitive and business-oriented legal and regulatory frameworks governing the offer of ICT services noting that there is no real difficulty to regulate a fair competition between public and private operators offering the same services in a given market. It is not recommended in general that the Arab countries adopt regulatory frameworks where one of the public or the private sector is completely excluded from the offering of ICT services in particular, mobile and Internet services
- Enable public administrations reform to achieve transparency, accountability and good governance
- Fully involve Arab private sector entities and civil society organisations in the formulation of the operational national and sub-regional strategies aiming to develop the ICT activities in the Arab countries
- Diminish and when possible remove duties levied on all ICT hardware and software and act in a way to promote the creation of e-content applications using Arabic language
- Formulate coherent national and regional policies and strategies for ICT development, using for this purpose National ICT Master-Plan, taking into account the multimedia convergence, with the objective to attract private national and sub-regional investments and set up National ICT committees bringing together the three components of the information

society, namely the public sector, the private sector and civil society and to adopt National ICT strategies that would be reviewed on a periodic basis

- Adopt an Arab Charter for the ICT that pay a due consideration to ethic and moral values of the Arab world in particular when using audio (radio) and video (TV) broadcasting media
- Actively involve the youth in national and regional ICT activities in particular through schools and universities and ensure better gender balance in ICT use while instituting specific programmes that address the need of women particularly those aimed at rural and disenfranchised areas
- Assist SME in their development activities

## **DECISIONS BY PREPCOM2 AND BY THE SUMMIT ITSELF**

The Arab Business Community is in the view that:

- a) The World Summit on Information Society in Geneva and Tunis should, respectively:
  - In Geneva, in December 2003
    - i. Adopt a plan of action for developing infrastructure suited to the needs of people and citizens of developing countries, with particular attention to least developed countries (LDC)
    - ii. Take a clear decision securing national domain names which should rest with a suitable international organization and which should take multilingualism into a great consideration
    - iii. Decide that countries-top-level-domain-names and IP address assignment should be the sovereign rights of countries and that the Internet governance should be multilateral, democratic and transparent taking into account the needs of public as well as private and civil society entities
    - iv. Recommend that National Regulatory Authorities should avoid, as far as possible, unilateral decisions that may lead to limitation in the Transfer of IC Technologies in favour of developing countries
    - v. Take decisions that aim to promote e-learning, e-health and more generally the development of Internet activities by individuals as well as by legal entities
    - vi. Take appropriate and balanced decisions aiming to protect Intellectual Property Rights while avoiding limitation of consumers, in particular of consumers from developing countries, to use IC Technologies. In this respect, the Summit should consider the issue of granting Very-Long-Term protection (50 years) for ICT creations noting that the technological evolution is running fast and consider to limit this period of protection at a maximum of ten years before it enters the Public Domain. The Summit should also consider the possibility to require from companies which offer IT software to be used by corporate entities and which are benefiting of a strict protection, that would

offer simplified version of these software for a free use by individuals

~~vi-vii.~~ Adopt international-cooperation programs for the development of e-business taking into account the financing of SME that intend to develop activities in this field and promote the implementation of appropriate national legal and regulatory frameworks aiming to facilitate e-business activities removing all factors or disposals that may prevent enterprises or individuals from doing business or launching transactions over the Internet

~~vii-viii.~~ Take decisions that promote the adoption of security procedures associated with payments and transaction authentication such as digital signature for e-banking and e-business

~~viii.~~

- In Tunis, in 2005
  - i. Proceed with an evaluation of the implementation of programs and Action-Plan adopted by WSIS-Phase1
  - ii. Adopt any other additional plan of action for narrowing the digital gap that would address the needs of developing countries

b) Bilateral and multilateral funding agencies should:

- Pay particular attention to financing infrastructure facilities and content suited to the needs of the peoples and citizens of developing countries, in particular those of LDC
- Pay particular attention to the involvement of the representatives of the private sector and the civil society in all decisions related to ICT development programs
- Work in a way to adopt appropriate ICT indicators that could help developing countries in managing the enhancing of ICT activities. In this respect, the International Telecommunication Union through its Arab Regional Office should be called upon to play a major role

c) Development partners:

- Pay particular attention to human resources training and development programs, particularly those targeting teachers and students so as to promote content and infrastructure development with the view to facilitate the emergence of an Arab service industry based on ICT
- Contribute to the forging of innovative and constructive partnerships among donors, public authorities, the private sector and civil society in order to develop ICT and content and build the infrastructure.



## **Annex1: THE ARAB DIGITAL INITIATIVE (ADI)**

### **The decision of launching the Arab Digital Initiative (ADI)**

In the address made to PrepCom1 plenary meeting *Telecommunication Information Technology (TIT)*, in coordination with the *International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)*, acting as the representative of the "Arab Business Community" in the *Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI)* for WSIS and in the HLSOC-Private Sector Division, announced the launching of an *Arab Digital Initiative (ADI)*.

The basic motivation that led TIT to announce the launching of this ADI and to announce it precisely during PrepCom1 (July, 2002) can be explained by:

1. The strong feeling, shared with the large majority of the actors of development in our region that the Arab populations, known as being highly-communicant populations, are willing and need to enter with force *the 21<sup>st</sup> century Global Information Society*
2. The awareness that entering this 21<sup>st</sup> Century Global Information Society requires a broad and permanent effort from all actors and especially that the highest political and economic authorities of Arab countries should understand how far the ICT field is the major strategic sector of activities. Because there is no possible economic growth and social integration out of a national and sub-regional strategies that give this field a full priority, the Arab world should be able to elaborate and implement such strategies
3. The strong view that new national legal and regulatory pro-competitive frameworks, development and business-oriented as well as huge investments are required to implement successfully these strategies. These national frameworks should be adopted by administrations without delay in all the Arab countries. Regarding the referred huge investments, it is assumed that they shall mainly come from Arab sources and most probably from the Arab Business Community entities. Consequently, the mobilization of the *political authorities* and *economic authorities (Arab Business Community)* bringing them in working together should be considered as a top priority noting that this mobilization should start with the WSIS according to the spirit of Res.56/183

### **ADI and the role of the Arab IT Forum in the coordination-work with Arab administrations**

ADI is a "development and business-oriented ICT program", involving Arab business entities aiming to bring the *ICT-Arab Business Community*, meaning private or public as well as public-private business entities working or interested in the field of ICT to act in a way to make the Arab world entering with force into *the 21<sup>st</sup> century Global Information Society*, starting with the widest possible participation of this Arab Business Community in *the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS)*.

Noting that the WSIS preparatory process, according to Res.56/183, is an intergovernmental process in which UN agencies and stakeholders should be associated, the mobilization of the

Arab Business Community for the WSIS should be implemented in coordination with Arab administrations and with the Arab League.

The Arab Business Community appeals to a global and permanent coordination with administrations and with the Arab League. In this respect, the **Arab IT Forum** constitutes the natural body for ensuring this Arab League + Arab administrations / Arab business entities coordination.

### **Mechanisms for the creation of ADI**

The mechanisms for the creation and the participation in the work of ADI should be based on following principles:

1. ADI should take the form of a virtual body using e-administrative procedures and methods of work
2. ADI is going to work under the guidance of a group of Arab Leaders and Top-Managers having a recognized skill and reputation in the field of entrepreneurship, showing a development and business-oriented mind or spirit, sharing the view that development of ICT activities is the key for a sustainable economic growth and for the social and human integration in the Arab countries and who are willing to promote public-private partnerships for investing in ICT activities in this region
3. ADI should act in order to implement concrete development and business-oriented projects in line with its General Objective, which means that pre-market and post-market control and evaluation procedures shall be put in place and considered as the essential criteria for the decision by ADI to start or to pursue a given ICT-project
4. In Arab countries where there is no National ICT Committee, ADI shall act in a way to encourage the setting-up of such committees involving representatives of the business community. In countries where National ICT committees already exist but where the membership is strictly limited to representatives of the administrations, ADI shall ask for the participation of business community representatives in these committees. When such request, for whatsoever reason is not going to be satisfied, ADI shall encourage the setting-up of *National ADI-Committees* composed exclusively of representatives of business communities that shall coordinate their work, at the national level with National ICT Committees. However, it is clear for ADI that the most appropriate situation would be the one both administration and business community representatives shall participate together in one unique National ICT Committee
5. ADI shall set-up an *Arab Digital Expert Team (ADET)* composed of experts from the different National ICT committees, from the Arab IT Forum and from any other relevant Arab ICT body or entity representing the various ICT communities such as: Fixed and Mobile terrestrial operators, hardware and equipment suppliers, financial and legal experts specialized in ICT, satellite operators, Media, E-learning, Banking, IT Industry, Software industry. ADET shall be tasked to prepare and evaluate the projects that ADI is supposed to promote or implement

### **Participation in the work of ADI: ADI-Message and ADI-General Objective.**

The ADI-Membership endorses the Okinawa Charter which, adapted to the situation of the Arab region, leads to the *ADI-Message*:

*"The Arab world is willing and ready to enter with force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Global Information Society from the benefit of which no Arab should be ever excluded" (ADI-Message, 2003)*

The ADI-Membership is committed, as its particular level of liability, means and competence in the implementation of the ADI-General Objective which is:

*"To coordinate in the future all actions and promote all kinds of economic and investment projects, in particular public-private partnerships in the field of ICT for the sake of economic development of the Arab peoples" (ADI-General Objective, 2003)*

### **Presentations of ADI before its official launching**

It is assumed that ADI is going to be launched officially on October 2003 after PrepCom3, two months before the Summit itself at the occasion of a dedicated event. Up to October, ADET shall be set-up (April 2003) and ADI shall be presented to the following forums:

- February 2003: PrepCom2 and the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the United Nations ICT Task Force.
- March 2003: ITU-D Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG) and TDAG Working Group on Private Sector issues
- April 2003:
  - With the support of government of Jordan and at its kind invitation, a conference shall be held in Amman on April 2003 aiming to announce the official setting-up the *Arab Digital Expert Team (ADET)* that is going to elaborate the programs that ADI shall manage in the future
  - Presentation of ADI to the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Arab League G50 which should allow us to stress out the support of the Arab League to ADI
- May 2003:
  - Presentation of ADI to the participants in the US-Arab Business Forum (15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, Detroit) of ADI to the ITU-D Annual Regional Development Conference for the Arab
  - Presentation region (Beirut, 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>)
- June 2003: Presentation of ADI to the WSIS-Regional preparatory conference for the Arab region (Cairo)