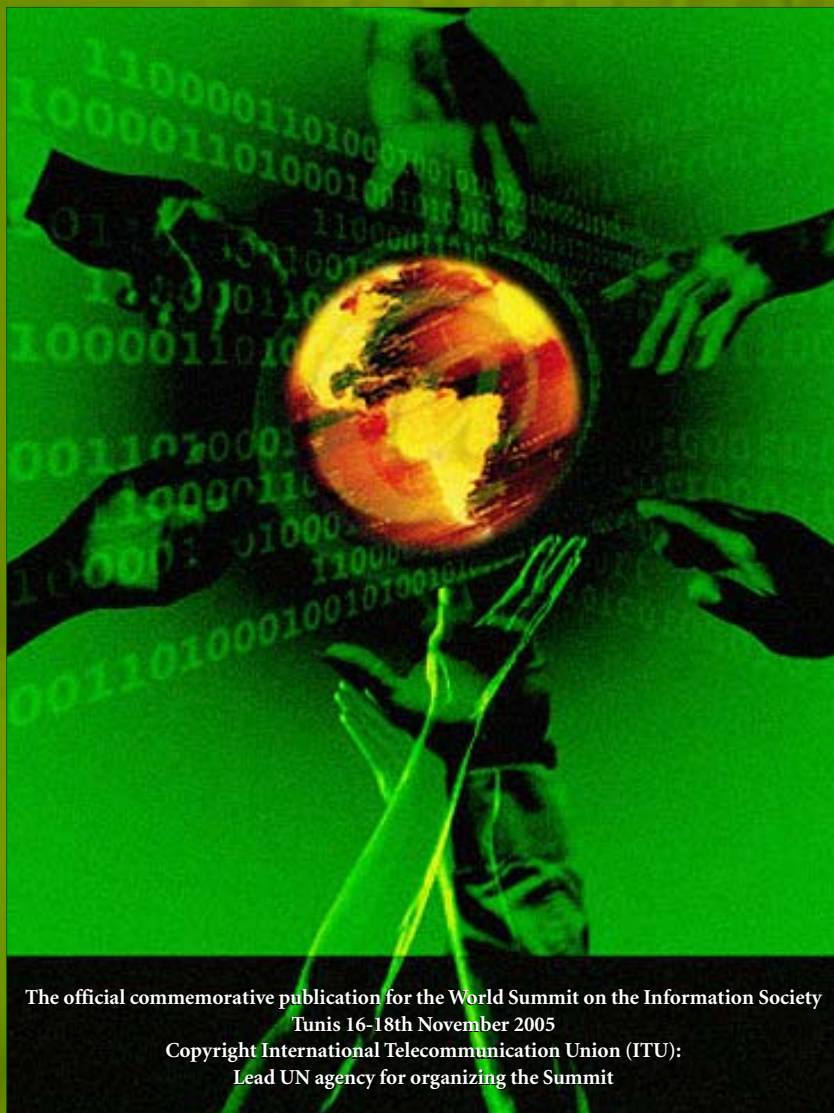


DIGITAL REACH



The official commemorative publication for the World Summit on the Information Society
Tunis 16-18th November 2005

Copyright International Telecommunication Union (ITU):
Lead UN agency for organizing the Summit

Bridging the digital divide

The digital revolution, fired by the engines of Information and Communication Technologies, has fundamentally changed the way people think, behave, communicate, work and earn their living.

It has forged new ways to create knowledge, educate people and disseminate information. It has restructured the way the world conducts economic and business practices, runs governments and engages politically. It has provided for the speedy delivery of humanitarian aid and healthcare, and a new vision for environmental protection. It has even created new avenues for entertainment and leisure.

As access to information and knowledge is a prerequisite to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it has the capacity to improve living standards for millions of people around the world. Moreover, better communication between peoples helps resolve conflicts and attain world peace.

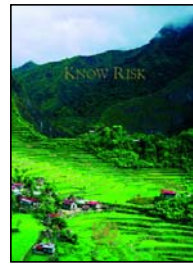
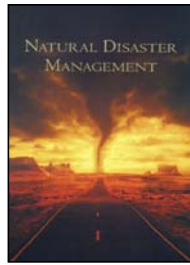
Paradoxically, while the digital revolution has extended the frontiers of the global village, the vast majority of the world remains unhooked from this unfolding phenomenon. With the ever-widening gulf between knowledge and ignorance, the development gap between the rich and the poor among and within countries has also increased. It has therefore become imperative for the world to bridge this digital divide and place the MDGs on the ICT-accelerated speedway to achievement.

World Summit on the Information Society

Recognizing that this new dynamic requires global discussion, the International Telecommunication Union, following a proposal by the Government of Tunisia, resolved in 1998 to hold a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and place it on the agenda of the United Nations.

In 2001, the ITU Council decided to hold the Summit in two phases, the first in Geneva during December 2003 and the second from **16 to 18 November 2005** in Tunis. This was endorsed by the UN General Assembly while according the lead role to ITU in cooperation with other interested organizations and partners. The objective of the first phase was to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and take concrete steps to establish the foundations for an inclusive Information Society, reflecting all the different interests at stake. At the Geneva Phase of WSIS nearly 50 Heads of state/government and Vice-Presidents, 82 Ministers, and 26 Vice-Ministers and Heads of delegation from 175 countries as well as high-level representatives from international organizations, the private sector, and civil society provided political support to the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action that were adopted on 12 December 2003. More than 11,000 participants from 175 countries attended the Summit and related events.

The scope and nature of this ambitious project requires new public-private partnerships, many of which were formalized during the Geneva Summit. Some of them were specifically targeted at bridging the digital divide. Before the Summit meets again in Tunis in November 2005, efforts are being made to put the Plan of Action into motion. Besides, measures are being taken to bridge the digital divide and hasten the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals with the help of ICTs.



Commemorative volume

In preparation for the Tunis Summit Tudor Rose, a commercial publisher and information provider, and ITU have agreed to produce together a publication entitled **DIGITAL REACH**. Published in November 2005, the book has been timed to cover all the key thematic areas for the Summit and will debate how these issues, crucial to humanity, will be met in the years ahead. This innovative endeavour is a striking example of sharing respective resources to engage the many official governmental, international, institutional and professional interests in displaying the extent and variety of their efforts to reduce the digital divide.

The book is a joint ITU-Tudor Rose publication, and available for sale through ITU and other appropriate channels from November 2005 (recommended retail price US\$125 per copy) in a premium hardback cover and of approximately 250 pages.

Copies of the publication will be presented free of charge to each delegation at the Tunis Summit, and courtesy of Tudor Rose Programme Partner Agreements, thousands more complimentary copies will be delivered directly to stakeholders within developing nations.



Tudor Rose is a specialist publisher and information provider, based in the United Kingdom. Over the past decade Tudor Rose has committed considerable resources to publishing in the humanitarian development field and specifically in support of numerous UN agencies and initiatives. Most recently the group produced **KNOW RISK**, a UN copyright publication for the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) Secretariat. The book was launched at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005 to considerable official acclaim. Tudor Rose places design and editorial quality and integrity at the heart of its mission statement. Its design team has earned a reputation for delivering high quality, professional and appealing results - always on time and within budget. Its editorial staff play a vital role in producing material that is compelling, innovative and vibrant - constantly offering informed and incisive opinion to its subject. Specialist journalists provide skills and expertise across a range of vertical and horizontal sectors and continually demonstrate a flair for operating under pressure, producing a consistently high standard of material. Additionally the group offers a broad range of skills and services in the delivery of custom websites, electronic newsletters, presentation CDs and other forms of electronic media.

Role and Work of the Union

The International Telecommunication Union is an international organization within the United Nations System where governments and the private sector coordinate global telecom networks and services. It is unique among international organizations in that it was founded on the principle of cooperation between governments and the private sector.

With a membership encompassing telecommunication policy-makers and regulators, network operators, equipment manufacturers, hardware and software developers, regional standards making organizations and financing institutions, ITU's activities, policies and strategic direction are determined and shaped by the industry it serves.

Mandated by its Constitution to "extend the benefits of the new telecommunication technologies to all the world's inhabitants", ITU has been a driving force behind these changes and the emergence of the Information Society. For the past 140 years, the International Telecommunication Union has worked relentlessly to harmonize national policies worldwide, bridge technological differences, foster interconnectivity of systems: in other words, to facilitate the availability of information and communication technologies on a global basis.

Over the past 20 years, telecommunications have grown from a tool that facilitated person-to-person communications to the foundation that underpins a huge number of human activities, from international trade and commerce to health and, increasingly, education.

Fast, reliable telecommunication networks are now a vital ingredient in the trans-border delivery of services such as banking, transportation, tourism, online information and electronic home shopping. Their activities cover all aspects of telecommunication, from setting standards that facilitate seamless interworking of equipment and systems on a global basis to adopting operational procedures for the vast and growing array of wireless services and designing programmes to improve telecommunication infrastructure in the developing world.

ITU's work has provided the essential background and support that has enabled telecommunications to grow into a USD 1 trillion industry worldwide.

United Nations Summits

United Nations Summits play a vital role in highlighting a variety of issues that have commanded the attention of people everywhere. They work towards building global consensus backed by the political commitment of world leaders. By involving Heads of state and government and other eminent personalities from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as from civil society and the private sector, Summit events have put long-term, difficult problems like poverty, health and environmental degradation at the top of the global agenda. By seizing front-page headlines, they have helped mould world opinion and persuaded world leaders to provide political support.

The participation of thousands of NGOs, citizens, academics and businesspeople, in both the official and unofficial meetings, has turned these conferences into true "global forums". The UN has encouraged this, knowing that the support of a wide spectrum of society is needed to form and implement policies that may affect the future course of the world.

The first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society is committed to lay the foundations for "building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting sustainable development and improving their quality of life." The second phase aims at concrete follow-up and implementation of the Action Plan and building partnerships to achieve the goal of connecting people to the benefits of information and communication technologies. At the same time, by increasing the reach of information and knowledge, it aims to empower people to achieve their aspirations for a better life. This Summit is therefore regarded as the Summit of Solutions.

Targets to be achieved by 2015 include making ICT accessible to more than half of humanity by connecting villages, universities, colleges, secondary and primary schools, scientific and research centres, public libraries, cultural centres, museums, post offices and archives, as well as health centres and hospitals. Local and central government departments would also be connected and provided with websites and e-mail addresses. By that date as well, all primary and secondary school curricula should have been adapted to meet the challenges of the Information Society.

Looking ahead to Tunis and beyond, a number of key areas will be addressed, including Internet governance, regional integration, monitoring and measuring progress, financial mechanisms, cyber security and global engagement. Specifically, the scope for ICT applications is envisioned for e-strategies in areas of universal concern such as poverty eradication, health, environment, disaster reduction, business, trade, and agriculture.