

AUSTRIA

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Austria fully supports the idea of a truly Global Information Society. That means a Society where all persons, without any distinction, are empowered freely to create, receive, share and utilize quality information and knowledge for their social, cultural, economic and political development.

The development of the information society has to be built on the reaffirmation of the 1993 "Vienna Declaration and Program of Action" adopted by the "World Conference on Human Rights" that *"human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent and that their protection is the first responsibility of governments"* - as mentioned in a statement of independent experts from all over the world during the international symposium on "Human Rights, Human Dignity and the Information Society" held in Geneva last month.

We are confronted with a global digital divide that results in unequal access to information and to the means of communication and information. So Austria warmly welcomes the main goal of the World Summit - to reduce the digital divide - and we fully support information technology integration of least developed countries into the information society by reducing the digital divide between technology-empowered and technology-excluded communities and groups - such as people in rural areas and women.

Public authorities, the private sector and civil society have to search for concrete and efficient strategies and possibilities to fight against the existing "digital gap" between those who are connected to information and communication technologies and their tools and those who are excluded: excluded in terms of access to the network, in terms of culture and education and ability to process all the information.

The main topics for Austria range from ICT application in education and training to gender mainstreaming, info-ethics and wider public access to information and knowledge. ICT usage in educational processes should not only enhance the quality of education in general and the quality of information and communication in particular, but should also extend mutual understanding and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity as a prerequisite of sustainable development.

Taking this into consideration Austria is of the opinion that emphasis should be given on cultural diversity and identity, on the creation of varied information content and the digitisation of the educational, scientific and cultural heritage. Measures and strategies fostering the creative use of interactive digital media for producing new, exciting and useful content and innovative content-rich applications are important elements in avoiding a so called content gap. Beside ICTs the content industry is one of the most important factors of information society. Therefore, plurality of content and the media must be promoted not only on national and regional level but also be seen as a global

challenge. I appreciate that both the "Declaration of Principles" and the "Action Plan" encourage us to concentrate on these important tasks in mutual understanding and cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are challenged by the power of new technologies and the way people are using them to network, to create new forms of partnerships and collaboration, to share experiences and knowledge locally and globally. Local, in the sense that people are rooted in their communities and in their identities, but act globally at the same-time.

I hope we all can agree on the necessity of international solidarity on a global scale in the production, sharing and dissemination of knowledge, ideas and experiences. Bearing in mind that the WSIS process has constantly been moving from "information" to "society", we have to be aware of that Information society is about people, communication society is about social processes, and knowledge society is about society's values. Finally, I want to quote what a representative of Civil Society said during one of the Prepcom-Meetings here in Geneva: "It is not digital that counts - it is dignity!"

Thank you."