

**Address by the President
of the Swiss Confederation
Pascal Couchepin**

**Closure of the
World Summit
on the Information Society**

Geneva, 12 December 2003

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Only the address as delivered
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Honourable Heads of State and Government,

Mr Secretary-General,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The time has come to look at what we have achieved at this first stage of the World Summit on the Information Society.

The Summit has placed a new subject on the international agenda: the information society. Thirteen thousand people have come to Geneva. Such large numbers have exceeded all our expectations. The level of participation, the quality of the exchanges, the richness and diversity of the events have shown that there was an urgent need for a high-level debate on the information society.

The three-day dialogue between representatives of governments and civil society has highlighted what is at stake in the information and knowledge society. All the participants have voiced their hopes and concerns in a constructive spirit.

Geneva 2003 will stay in my mind as being the launch of a new international dialogue and a new political concept, namely digital solidarity. An innovatory political process has been set in motion. For the first time in United Nations history, States have invited civil society to participate in the debates.

It was quite right to allow things to be opened up in this way. The information society came into being independently of governments, and in many ways it is the result of private initiatives. Governance of the Internet, for example, shows that cooperation between the business sector, governments and international organizations is essential.

This new form of international dialogue cannot be taken for granted. States are not in the habit of relinquishing their prerogatives. Civil society too must learn to make the compromises that are needed in international negotiations.

In the end, however, States have taken non-governmental organizations and the business sector seriously. The government representatives have incorporated a number of suggestions from civil society in the final documents that we are adopting today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issues involved in the information society are new, so it is difficult to get to grips with them. This has not made the negotiations easy. I have seen the faces of certain negotiators animated by the effects of tough but invigorating debate. Even though fatigue sometimes made its presence felt in the negotiating teams, I know that the will to get things done always prevailed. Even though we did not always agree, we knew that this debate had to take place.

This strength of conviction has enabled us to agree on a declaration and a plan of action and to ensure the success of the Summit.

The "Geneva Declaration and Plan of Action" are good documents. We have reached a sound compromise. The Declaration represents a sort of "constitution" for the information society, which must contain a social dimension and foster development. This constitution is based on the United

Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to freedom of opinion and expression is its essential foundation. The Geneva Declaration points the way to an information society which is accessible to all and based on shared knowledge.

The Declaration sets out principles, the Plan of Action translates them into practice. We still have work to do. Geneva is the start of a process leading to the second phase of the Summit in Tunisia. Tunis 2005 will be an initial assessment of the implementation of policies adopted today in the Plan of Action.

We have been able to take advantage of the Summit being structured in two phases. For two of the most important themes – funding and Internet governance – we have given a mandate to the United Nations Secretary-General. The conclusions of the working groups will mark the second phase of the Summit in Tunis.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Swiss Government and on my own behalf, I should like to thank you for being here in such numbers and for demonstrating your commitment. The last few days have been rich and stimulating in every way. I believe that we can conclude this Summit with a feeling of satisfaction and pride.

In a year when multilateral dialogue has been faced with various difficulties, for example in Cancún and New York, the success of this Summit gives us fresh confidence. Here in Geneva we have begun to lay the foundations of a new information society characterized by solidarity and openness. Our common desire is for a future that is more just and more equitable.

Thank you.