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**PERMANENT MISSION OF INDIA
TO THE OFFICES OF THE UNITED NATIONS,
ITS SPECIALISED AGENCIES AND OTHER
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN GENEVA**

STATEMENT BY

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AT THE

WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

GENEVA, DECEMBER 11, 2003

World Summit on the Information Society

From Geneva to Tunis

Mr. President, distinguished participants,

As a result of detailed and intensive exchanges, valuable declarations have been agreed upon. They set out important principles. They set out a sound work programme.

As a country that has secured many gains from Information Technology – India earns around \$ eleven billion from the export of IT services and products every year; as a country that has contributed significantly to the growth of this field – one-third of the start-ups in Silicon Valley were by Indians!; as a country that is one of the principal knowledge-generators in this field – over 100 of the Fortune-500 companies have set up R&D centers in India; as the country that today has three-fourths of the world's CMM Quality level V companies; as a country that is expanding the infrastructure for an Information Society rapidly – we are adding 1.3 million subscribers to mobile telephony every month, we have already laid out 500,000 kilometers of fiber optic network; India will participate vigorously in the work programme that you are adopting.

You are instituting a Working Group to ascertain the feasibility and effectiveness of setting up a Fund for advancing Information Society. Should such a Fund be set up, India will contribute financially in accordance with the formula that collective deliberations yield. To be of even greater assistance, we will contribute in kind – by training and equipping people for this new society, by sharing the substantial experience that we have acquired in spheres such as eGovernance, Telemedicine, imparting literacy, Information Security, language technologies. Indian firms today equip people in over 55 countries for the Information Society. Our Government is itself setting set up Cyber cities and training centers in other countries. I am delighted to report that just day before yesterday the Prime Minister of India and the President of Ghana opened the Kofi Anan Center for Excellence that India has established in Accra for West Africa. Friends, the inauguration itself was a token of a new world – the Indian Prime Minister was in Delhi, the President in Accra; they inaugurated the Center via a video teleconference! We will redouble such initiatives.

Sir, one of the gains of your deliberations has been that important issues such as Intellectual Property, Internet Governance, and freedom of speech have been subjected to

close examination. The declarations that you are adopting are carefully modulated, they embody a fine balance between several competing objectives.

Freedom

In India we value freedom for itself – in regard to the subject of your deliberations, Knowledge and Information Societies, we believe that they are predicated on creativity, and it is in freedom that creativity flourishes best. For the same reason, we are deeply committed to freedom of speech: on the rarest of rare occasions when a hand has been raised to curtail it, the people have singed that hand. Moreover, we recognize that the right to information is the foundation of freedom to speak one's mind.

Internet Governance

You are requesting the Secretary General to set up a Working Group to think through issues concerning Internet Governance. India has considerable experience in this regard, and we will contribute in whatever way the Secretary General deems appropriate. I have two suggestions. In going through the deliberations that you have held on this matter, I feel that, the preliminary technical points having been discussed at length, we should now look farther afield. Consider just one example. As we modernize, our economies, our financial systems, our power grids, our rail and air traffic control systems get progressively integrated. A vast literature is already available – it is available on the Internet itself! -- on how Information Technology can -- and *should!* -- be used to disrupt such progressively integrating systems. All of us together have to devise ways to prevent terrorists and other adversaries from doing so. I am, therefore, confident that the Working Group will examine the issue more comprehensively than has been possible in the run-up to this Summit.

I would also urge that even as the Group examines issues relating to Internet Governance, it scout for impedances that are created in fact. This will ensure that the next time we deliberate on the matter we are dealing with actual misuse of servers and the like rather than warding off miasmas and hypothetical possibilities.

Felt needs

Sir, as you know this is a sphere in which technological change occurs at lightning speed, in which the technological possibilities are beyond what we can imagine today. In such spheres there is often the temptation of plenty. Everything seems worth doing. Someone in government or in a firm hears of something that has been done somewhere -- sometimes he even thinks up some bright application! As he has the position or resources, work on that idea commences. Substantial sums are spent developing and then installing that application. But when after a few years it is seen that such pursuits did not

yield any concrete benefit to people, they discredit the new technologies, they compound cynicism.

Therefore, we should, through the new technologies, address specific, and urgent needs of our people.

- There are many fancy applications for eGovernance, for instance. In India a few hundred applications have been developed and adopted. But the one that has brought immediate, tangible benefit to ordinary farmers is that in some states all land records have been digitized – so that the farmer can secure title documents etc. without having to wait upon the village official.
- Similarly, by installing telemedicine infrastructure and software, we have enabled patients in distant, isolated communities to receive the best medical diagnosis and advice in the foremost of our hospitals.
- Eighteen languages are recognized as official languages under our Constitution. To enable people to access these new technologies, software has been developed that transforms text – and will soon convert speech – automatically from one language to another.
- The script of Indian languages is phonetic. That of English is not. Therefore, software has been developed by which, while I type on a standard English keyboard, the computer transcribes and prints the text in the script of the Indian language.
- Many of us cannot read print – either because we are visually impaired or because we are illiterate. We have therefore developed software that transforms text into speech. This has already been done for anything available in electronic form – for instance, a person who is blind can by just a click or two get to his favourite newspaper on the Internet, and the computer reads out the paper to him.

Yesterday, Mrs. Kicki Nordstrom, President of the World Blind Union, drew our attention to the fact that she could not read the papers of this conference – they are not available in Braille. Let us reflect on that reproach for a moment. The papers of this Summit are available in print. In India we already use software to convert printed text into electronic form, and then print the text in Braille. As this Summit is about the Information Society, we can be confident that the papers will soon be available on the Internet. That is where we come in. I give you my assurance, Mrs. Nordstrom, that within three months I will personally send you text-to-voice software that will read aloud all the papers the moment they are accessed on the website of the Summit. Imagine the liberation that such steps spell for a blind child, for the aged parent who has lost sight because of macular degeneration.

- Similarly, one of the doyens of the IT industry in India, Mr. F. C. Kohli, has developed methods for making people literate using IT that are bound to spell a revolution. Instead of teaching the person to read by first getting him to learn the alphabet, the method exposes her or him to the word as a whole; simultaneously, the person hears the sound and sees a depiction of what the word connotes. Through this “total immersion”, and capitalizing on the fact that a vocabulary of just 500 to 700 words is sufficient for reading the average, daily newspaper, almost 40,000 persons who were totally, but totally illiterate have been brought to a level that they can now read newspapers on their own. This has been done through instruction of just 1 to 1 ½ hours a day for just 10 weeks.

I could readily give scores of examples of this kind. My suggestion is that even as, and specially because the new technologies make so many things seem attractive, we should sharpen our focus, and concentrate efforts on those projects that will spell immediate benefits to vast numbers, and which will lift them into this new Information Society.

Six areas for focused effort

Permit me, Sir, to suggest six areas concentration on which will yield immediate benefits:

- Abolishing illiteracy;
- Upgrading existing educational institutions – for instance, engineering and medical colleges – by connecting them with the best institutions in the country or region so that students in the less advantaged ones can share the teaching material, the lectures etc. of the best;
- Distant diagnosis and prescription of those who are not well;
- Enabling the disabled – specially the print disabled;
- Codifying traditional knowledge – for instance, household, indigenous remedies for common ailments.

Sir, I have one final suggestion, and I will conclude.

Four projects worthy of this gathering

After a great deal of sustained effort, declarations have been finalized. They will soon be adopted. The Summit should now go beyond declarations. We should agree on a few actual programmes that we will execute in mission mode – so that when we meet in Tunis two years from now, we are not just deliberating on the next declaration but are celebrating actual accomplishments.

In a word, in the coming months we should adopt a few specific projects of global reach and global significance, and organize coordinated research on them. Of the many projects that occur to one, I commend four for your consideration:

- Use ICT to abolish illiteracy;
- Develop the Universal Networking Language – so that a person in India can put his data or message on to the Net in any of our 18 languages, the machine should translate it into the Universal Networking Language, and my friend in Iran should be able to receive it in Persian;
- Bring text-to-voice and voice-to-text software to perfection so that worlds from which they are today shut out are opened to the print disabled;
- Today one of the severest impediments to enabling people to avail the benefits of the Information Society is the expense of laying the infrastructure to their doorstep; we should complete research that would enable wireless signals to go to a multiple of the 50/60 kilometers they traverse at present.

Each of these is a do-able task.

Each of these will spell untold benefit to millions.

Together, they are worthy of a gathering as exalted as this one.

We should join hands so that they are accomplished -- *before* we meet in Tunis.

Thank you.