

NEPAL

Statement by Hon'ble Kamal THAPA, Minister for Information and Communications, at the World Summit for the Information Society in Geneva on December 11 2003

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Please allow me to extend to you, Mr. President, on behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, hearty congratulations on your assumption as the President of this important Summit.

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have dramatically altered our way of life and widened our horizon. We have witnessed remarkable improvements brought about by the ICTs in all fields be they business, education, medicine or other social and economic activities. It is vividly clear that if harnessed properly, they can be effective instruments to tackle many contemporary socio-economic and other development challenges. But unfortunately, this revolution has by passed a vast majority of people, mostly from the developing countries. Between developed and developing nations, and within societies, the benefits of ICTs continue to remain uneven. And, turning this digital divide into a digital opportunity for all is a real challenge for all of us.

The purpose of this summit -the first of its kind- is precisely to serve that very objective in order to build an open, equitable and inclusive Information Society. It is remarkable that for the first time all the ICT stake holders in this innovative process have gathered here with a view to build a new form of partnership and cooperation. We welcome this new and constructive beginning of a global solidarity. This multi stakeholder process is not only a reality of today's interconnected society, it is also indispensable to ensure sustainability of progress and foster social inclusiveness.

Our concern in Nepal today is for creating such an environment for its over all development so that all segments of society could derive meaningful benefit from it. Even in the midst of formidable paucity of financial and human resources, and lack of adequate physical infrastructure, His Majesty's Government of Nepal is striving hard to create an enabling environment, where all people including the poor and the vulnerable, are able to get an affordable and equitable access to information infrastructure. In this context, His Majesty's Government of Nepal has adopted the policy of e-strategy by developing a framework of e-governance, e-commerce, e-education and e-medicine. We have plans to provide at least 2 telephone lines in each of about 4000 villages and establish 1500 IT access centres by the year 2007.

Similarly, right to information is guaranteed by the Constitution of the country. The Government is therefore committed to playing the role of facilitator in ensuring and promoting this right among the people. Aware of the vital role that the media can play in creating and sustaining an equitable and inclusive information society, we have adopted a liberal policy in this sector. This has created a healthy competition with the burgeoning growth of the private sector in the print media as well as TV and FM radio operation.

Mr. President,

As the current Chair of the SAARC, Nepal would like to recall that a meeting of the SAARC Information Ministers was recently held in New Delhi. This meeting has underlined, among others, the need of the commitment at the national, regional and international level to promote ICTs for bridging the digital divide, particularly for the disadvantaged and the marginalized section of the societies.

We firmly believe that the realization of a common vision of building a truly people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society is possible. But to do so, efforts at creating opportunity for equal access to information and communications and making them affordable must receive an enhanced level of international support. Increased support and cooperation in areas such as, training, technology

transfer, human resource, and information and communication infrastructure development would be crucial to build the national capacity in these countries. And nowhere is this need so more pressing than in the least-developed and the land locked countries in their efforts to bridge the digital divide and effectively contribute to improve the quality of life of the people. Therefore we appreciate appropriate financing and institutional mechanism to fulfill the objectives of the digital solidarity agenda.

In conclusion, Mr. President, ICT has become a powerful tool for growth and prosperity for many in today's world. But we should also stress the development dimension of this tool. We should effectively use it for bringing about real transformation in the lives of the poor and marginalised segments of the societies around the world. That is possible only in a true spirit of partnership and solidarity. We would like this summit to play a catalytic role in paving the way for a new era of sustained peace, equity and prosperity with the strategic use of Information and Communication technologies to attain these noble objectives.

I thank you.