



Office of the High Commissioner  
for Human Rights



## World Summit on the Information Society

Statement by  
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Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address the World Summit on the Information Society, the Summit where world leaders have gathered to set a path in this area for the future of the global community.

With the emergence of the Information Society the world is going through profound changes which have the potential to substantially transform our lives and the lives of future generations. We seek to build an Information Society where people and individuals are placed at its centre, where human dignity is firmly upheld and where human rights are recognized as its guiding principles. How can we best ensure that these principles are reflected in an Information Society? How can we make best use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), which are the vital tools and building blocks in this endeavor? These questions await our answer, our commitment and our concerted action.

Throughout the preparatory process for this World Summit, we have heard about and discussed international human rights standards. These standards have been developed on the basis of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and constitute a set of internationally adopted norms, relevant to all spheres of life. I want to reaffirm these standards today in particular in the context of formulating our common vision of the Information Society.

Mr. President,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all should be concerned about the potentially negative impact that the dramatic advances in telecommunications, broadcasting and other forms of information and communication technologies could have on human rights. Rapid advances in surveillance and security technologies can have a chilling impact on freedoms of expression and association and new technologies can also be used to restrict access to information. At the same time, and with due regard to the freedom of expression, governments surely have an interest in seeking to prevent the dissemination of hate and racist messages, child pornography and other abuses of human dignity.

These issues remind us of the serious responsibility of those who have the means, power and authority to ensure that technologies are applied for the promotion and protection of human rights and human dignity.

Let us remember that information and communication technologies are not only means of exchanging and disseminating information, but crucial tools to improve the enjoyment of human rights such as the freedom of expression, the right to seek, receive and impart information; the right to privacy; the right to an adequate standard of living; the right to education; the right to health; and the right to development.

The principle of non-discrimination demands universal access by all to information and services as an

overall goal. All individuals, communities and peoples should be able to enjoy full and equal membership in the Information Society of the future. These technologies can bring enormous benefits to people in developing countries or countries in economic transition, and make government more accessible, transparent and democratic. Information and communication technologies can also preserve cultural diversity and multilingualism, and support marginalized and vulnerable groups-including migrants, refugees, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and people living in rural areas. Such technologies can also accommodate the special needs of girls and women and be used as a tool to promote gender equality.

In my Human Rights Day message of yesterday, I pleaded for the world of the Universal Declaration to become reality for all the world's peoples. I pleaded for democracy, the rule of law, and for justice. Today, I join all of you to renew our commitment to building an equitable, participatory, democratic Information Society where all are free from fear, from want and from prejudice and fully enjoy his or her human rights.

Thank you.