

**ADDRESS BY DR IVY MATSEPE CASABURRI,
MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE FIRST PHASE OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON
THE INFORMATION SOCIETY
11 DECEMBER 2003**

President of the Summit

Honorable Heads of State or Government and other Heads of Delegation

Secretary-General of the UN, Mr. Kofi Annan

Secretary-General of the ITU, Mr. Yoshio Utsumi

Distinguished delegates

It is not many times in life that we have a chance to change the lives of so many millions of people, and in a profound and lasting way. Today marks one of those rare occasions.

We have said that this Summit will be successful and historic because we believe that it has laid the foundations necessary to turn hopes into reality.

The World Summit on the Information Society can and should leave a mark in the history of human development as well as for the United Nations system.

Allow me President, to begin my contribution with a special reference to a very distinguished member of the South African civil society delegation to this important Summit, Ms Clara Basenjeng Masinga whose participation has been sponsored by the Southern African WSIS partnership.

Ms Masinga is from the Kgautshwane community in Limpopo one of the underdeveloped provinces of our country. She is a recipient of the Order of the Counsellor of the Baobab one of our highest national awards granted by the President.

This is how a leading Sunday paper describes her work and her community. 'The Kgautshwane's home is on the border of Limpopo and Mpumalanga. It is a mountainous area that was bypassed by development, maybe due to its terrain. It is made up of 19 villages that have neither electricity

nor telephones and only borehole water.

She has built a community centre which grows vegetables for the poor and the ill; it has a computer centre, a sewing workshop, kitchens and an arts centre. It contains an information centre, a development co-op and a financial services microbank, which is built up both from personal savings and external investment.'

President,

Clara Masinga personifies not only resilience but also the depth and possibility for change that can result from the constructive use of ICT's that we have been talking about in this Summit.

There are many, like Ms Masinga, who have put their hopes on this Summit and its outcome to do what would otherwise be inconceivable, jump several stages in the development process. This is why we believe this Summit can and should leave an indelible mark.

We congratulate Switzerland for this Summit which we can already declare as successful and historic. Our congratulations and thanks also go to the President of the Preparatory Committee, Mr. Samassekou. Tunisia deserves our special appreciation for the bold and visionary initiative to hold this Summit.

President,

When we entered this millennium only three years ago we, as all nations, gave ourselves the task to combat what we considered to be the biggest challenge of our times, poverty and underdevelopment. We must meet the development challenge. To meet this challenge it is essential that technologies be used in an appropriate manner which allows the ordinary person to derive benefit.

In our view we are faced with two interrelated challenges which have to be addressed simultaneously. Bridging the digital divide and building an inclusive Information Society for the future.

Bridging the digital divide is a corrective measure aimed at addressing past and existing inequalities and disparities. This aspect is characterized by, amongst others, a sense of urgency,

using any and every kind of technology to patch up where there is no access. For example, developing special measures for the marginalized such as women and youth; providing special equipment for people with disabilities; facilitating the provision of opportunities for the re-training of workers; creating special laws to protect children from harmful uses of ICTs; using public institutions such as post offices and libraries as access points; creating programmes specially designed for rural and remote communities; rolling out ICT projects to link health centres and introducing school curriculum that incorporates ICT training.

Building the Information Society is however a pro-active measure. It entails the creation, from the start, of conditions that eliminate a differentiated approach. It is characterized by planning, developing policies, measures and strategies with clear time lines; ensuring the development and deployment of technologies that meet the requirements of interoperability, universal use, relevance, accessibility and affordability; creating not only special laws but also incorporating measures to protect children from harmful uses of ICTs in the technology design; reforming institutions such as post offices and libraries to be reflective of e-environment, mainstreaming ICTs into the entire health and education systems and economic-political participation as part of the development plan.

In his address to the UN General Assembly in September this year President Mbeki said that the UN system needed to be capable of responding to the challenges of the 21st century.

The rapid development of ICTs their impact on our lives oblige us to creating space within the UN where we can address the policy challenges that this development poses. The matter of a coordinated mechanism within the UN system that incorporates existing and other players including the private sector and civil society is also becoming urgent.

Our institutions of global governance in the ICT sector need to be representative, relevant and legitimate and should enable all residents of the global village to set the agenda together thus building an inclusive information Society. To date only the UN can give this legitimacy.

At this juncture, we would like to pay special tribute to the women and men from every corner of the world who, through their tireless and not always visible/recognized efforts, have made the advances in technology that have brought us to where we are, possible.

The private sector's contribution, especially through investment in research and development also merits our appreciation.

Like many other developing countries, South Africa has benefited substantially from knowledge sharing. It also has vast potential to contribute to the global knowledge pool, especially our unique indigenous knowledge. We are satisfied that it has started a process that will lead to a more balanced international environment for not only the protection but also noble ideal of sharing knowledge.

It is ten years that South Africa became a democracy. Many in the media played an important role in our struggle for this democracy. We are convinced that the media can equally play an instrumental and effective role in building an inclusive Information Society.

As a country, we re-iterate our commitment to ensure that conditions exist that allow the media to play its role and call upon this important stakeholder to assume its role in society with corresponding responsibility .

We will also continue to enhance our policies that support the thriving of diversity of views, thought, languages, culture and local content through, amongst others, media ownership diversity. In our experience, community media has played a special role in this regard.

In conclusion President,

It is our view that from this historic Summit, Ms Clara Masinga can go back to her community with a message to her grand-children that there is not only hope but also certainty that they will be equal and active members of the Information Society.

She can also tell them that their unique identity will add to the richness of this Information Society not only in form but also in content.

And I thank you