

STATEMENT BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE ULUKALALA LAVAKA ATA
PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS

OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA ON THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS),
10-12 DECEMBER 2003

11 DECEMBER 2003, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Mr. President

Secretary General of the United Nations

Secretary General of the International Telecommunications Union

President of the Swiss Confederation and the Republic and Canton of Geneva

Excellencies

Leaders of Civil Society

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour to be here today in Geneva at this World Summit on the Information Society.

We have gathered today to carefully assess the global challenge facing us in this new millennium under the theme of Information Society created by the explosion of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) during the past two decades. Information Society as we know is a system of shared knowledge and information, and we should enhance its potential to support the promotion of the goals of the Millennium Declaration and to achieve sustainable development as constituted in the Johannesburg Declaration.

Our collective effort here at this Summit is aimed at working together in partnership and solidarity to develop a common vision and better understanding of the Information Society and the adoption of a declaration and plan of action for implementation by Governments, International Institutions and all sectors of civil society.

ICT has enormous power to change economic structures and greatly contribute to economic prosperity and a better quality of life. Additionally, it can enrich people's lives through providing greater choice and supporting social, welfare and cultural activities.

Development of such a vision for ICT services and applications must be driven not only by local market parameters, but a recognition that the global nature of the information economy transcends national borders and interests. Similarly, any related policy framework should be designed to deliver a step-function improvement in the provision of services and applications that will guide its development. It should be centered on the need to give every citizen access to ICT tools so that all individuals can share the benefits of ICT.

Tonga has adopted the same set of principles driven by an understanding that expanded connectivity will stimulate domestic growth and will provide the scope for greater Tongan participation in the global information economy, guided by its prime objective which is "To improve sector performance to ensure domestic and global connectivity throughout the Kingdom of Tonga. This includes improving quality of life, geographic coverage, service affordability and access to new service applications."

This has resulted in the recent liberalization of the market and the introduction of competition. Within a year of implementing these policy decisions, tariff for almost all services dropped significantly by more than 200 percent. Teledensity, the number of mobile subscribers and Internet users have both doubled.

A Universal Access System is currently being designed to ensure that any citizen who requires communications access, can obtain it. This also includes emergency access communication from uninhabited islands.

Indeed, ICT has offered a historic and an unprecedented opportunity not only to bridging digital divide but also to place its potential at the service of humanity to make our world a better place.

Before closing Mr. President, please allow me on behalf of my delegation and the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, to convey and place on record our most sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the Secretary General of the United Nations and to all those who have helped for the logistical planning and arrangements of this Summit; and the Government and people of this most beautiful country of Switzerland and in particular Geneva for being an excellent host for this first ever Summit of its kind, and for your kind hospitality that have been duly accorded to us during our stay.

Thank you.