UNESCO
High Level Symposium
And Round Tables

Address by
Mr Abdul Waheed Khan

Assistant Director-General for
Communication and Information
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the session
for Reports from Multi-stakeholder Events (Plenary Session 5)
of the
World Summit on the Information Society

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Summit has provided an exceptional framework of opportunities to enlarge the debate on the future of the Information Society.

UNESCO was privileged to contribute to this debate. Our events aimed at promoting the concept of inclusive knowledge societies that empower people to use and transform information in creative, productive and innovative ways.

UNESCO's main event was a High Level Symposium on "Building Knowledge Societies - from Vision to Action". It brought together heads of state, ministers, Nobel Prize laureates, and leading academics, who highlighted the fact that ICT had brought about a third technological revolution, in which services and products, based on skills, knowledge and know-how, are playing a central part. We need to capitalise on these digital opportunities. We must also address the associated knowledge divide, focusing on capacity-building.

ICT should be used more fully to reduce poverty. Challenges in this regard are as much societal as they are technical - as we must balance technological precepts with human values, needs, capacities and opportunities.

Technical innovation can play a critical role in bridging the knowledge divide. ICT can facilitate the generation, acquisition, storage, use, sharing and dissemination of knowledge. It is also clear that ICT has tremendous potential for science and education.

Education remains pivotal in the preservation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge. To give full meaning to the WSIS Action Plan with respect to education, speakers stressed the need for strategies that will increase investment in education substantially; create open and flexible educational systems; institute life-long education; promote quality education in all its dimensions; and introduce ICT-based learning initiatives.

Moreover, there is a strong need to face the challenge of creating local content in diverse languages. Speakers emphasized that knowledge comes in different forms and has different meanings in different contexts. It must be viewed in terms of specific cultures and traditions. Action must therefore assume a mindset that allows for cultural diversity.

All speakers agreed that freedom of expression, for new and traditional media alike, the free flow of ideas and knowledge as well as unfettered, democratic access, was an absolute condition for the creation of open and inclusive knowledge societies.

The need to review the present intellectual property regime was underlined so as to bring it in line with the evolving digital environment and with its creative potential.

The seven other events on education, sciences, culture, and the media in knowledge societies that organized UNESCO over the last three days echoed the findings of the Symposium.

In conclusion, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am pleased to report that UNESCO and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation launched a special initiative to scale up Community Multimedia Centres in Mali, Mozambique and Senegal ensuring that marginalised communities in the three countries have a point of entry into the Information Society The Swiss government pledged three million Swiss francs for the scale up plan and will assist UNESCO in further fund raising efforts. The Presidents of Mali, Mozambique and Senegal attended the launch and expressed their commitment to the initiative.

The initiative that will establish 50 community multimedia centres in each of the countries is an excellent example for the practical realization of UNESCO's key principles for knowledge societies.

Thank you