Speech delivered to the plenary in the WSIS Multi-Stakeholder Event
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Your excellencies, Secretary General of the ITU, President of the Summit, delegatges, ladies and gentlemen,

I'd like to begin by asking you all to please stand up for just a moment. Now, if the middle section of the hall could be seated and the rest of you remain standing.

Take a good look around you.

If this hall were the population of the world, those now standing are young people.

Yes it is true. Young people are a majority of the world's population. The Net generation. A driving force behind technological entrepreneurship and innovation. Teaching our peers, teaching our parents, even teaching our teachers about ICTs. Leaders of the information revolution. We all know this.

However, the paradox is that despite this technological expertise, youth remain one of the most vulnerable and marginalized demographic groups.

- Youth unemployment rates are typically two to three times higher than the rates for adults
- Youth are often the first victims in conflict areas, whether it be civilians or child soldiers
- By the time I have finished this speech, five young people between the ages of 10-24 will have been infected with HIV/AIDS

We lack mainstream recognition, mainstream support and voice in the decisions that affect us each day.

Youth Day, December 10, organized by the WSIS Youth Caucus, highlighted these needs and answered the question of "Why Youth?" Vibrant workshops discussed Human Rights and Peacebuilding, E-learning, Youth Empowerment, Labour issues and National Information Society Youth Campaigns. The common thread was the focus on concrete, grassroots actions using ICTs for development.

Youth Day also demonstrated how young people can be, and are, catalysts for social change. The National Information Society Youth Campaigns, conceived and implemented by youth, have engaged tens of thousands of young people world-wide in action around the World Summit on the Information Society.

From Nigeria to Brazil, India to Romania, young people have coordinated a vibrant series of workshops, prime-time interactive radio programs, media outreach, video conferences, websites, surveys and more.

We have been meeting in community halls, going into schools, sending out local email newsletters, training others at inernet cafes, drafting national WSIS youth declarations, talking with decision-makers, and implementing concrete local projects.

These campaigns were made possible by the Governments of Canada and Switzerland and we would like to take this opportunity to thank them now for their commitment to youth activities in preparation for the Summit.

We're pleased that all our bottom-up consultations and input have resulted into the most powerful youth-related language ever in a UN Summit document. We now call on all stakeholders to implement this common vision for youth as stated in the Declaration of Principles, "empowering youth as learners, developers, contributors, entrepreneurs and decision-makers."

We have taken up the challenge to act ourselves today, by forging a coalition of organizations called Youth Creating Digital Opportunities (or YCDO). Our mission is to realize the potential of young people to use ICTs for more sustainable development in their communities. The Summit featured the launch of the YCDO Action Plan, which offers a strategic framework for WSIS Phase II. We encourage you to join and support us in this significant new initiative.

I'd like to echo the words of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan:

"Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies."

Now let us all walk together to create an equitable, empowering and participatory Information Society for all.

Thank you very much.