



Egypt

Address of H.E. Mr.
Mohamed Hosny Mubarak

President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

to the High-Level Forum of the
International Telecommunication Union
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"Egyptian Information Society Initiative"

Delivered by
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world summit
on the **information society**
Geneva 2003

Honorable Chair

Honorable Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure to be with you today in this most prominent event: the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. A gathering that signifies the evolving role of the ITU in the global Information Society, and in supporting and promoting our joint efforts towards development, modernization, and innovation.

Convened in the dawn of the new millennium, the WSIS stands as a new promise for regional and international cooperation, drawing lessons from the past and setting goals for the future, reflecting the needs of the developing world, and embracing developing countries as active participants in the global Information Society. Such goals and initiatives should be coupled with clear national and international commitments to be implemented on the ground. Hence, the role of the ITU emerges as the sole international umbrella that encompasses ICT stakeholders all over the world: governments, businesses, and non-government organizations. As we commend the ITU for its constructive efforts, we reiterate our belief in the importance of its evolving role to promote the knowledge and information society.

Undoubtedly, modern information and communication technology (ICT) present a challenge, in which the crucial role of knowledge has surfaced more than ever. This, in turn, has been reflected in the performance of countries in managing the massive new wave of knowledge generation. A technological, digital and knowledge divide exists between nations that have absorbed, used, and produced new knowledge and those that could not cope, or coped at a limited scale, with such a revolution. In order to overcome the poverty divide, the individual's legitimate access to knowledge as a tool to bridge the divide, is more important than mere subsidies and grants.

We are all here today out of our joint belief in the importance of putting practical solutions to bridge this technological divide. By facing the challenge of providing universal access to communication services, eradicating technology illiteracy and forging a framework for technology transfer, we will push forward development for all peoples of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to share with pride the significant political and socio-economic achievements Egypt has witnessed over the past two decades in laying the foundation for a contemporary society based on community participation in the continuous effort to develop and modernize.

Politically, we have deepened the reach of democracy and respect for human rights with a multi-party system that includes 17 political parties across the political spectrum; freedom of the press with over 700 daily publications; and an increased involvement of civil society with over 17 thousand non-government organizations. All this has developed in an atmosphere that promotes freedom of expression, exalts the rule of law, and protects the independence of the judiciary to create a healthy political environment for a modern society to prosper.

Economically, Egypt has taken significant strides in economic reform enabling the transformation to a free market, as well as the adoption, and successful implementation, of privatization policies commended by international economic institutions. An attractive investment climate and increased opportunities for the private sector have expanded community participation being the cornerstone of contemporary society. Our goals are to increase and improve exports, train our talented human resources and involve youth in all stages of the development process. Therefore, we deployed an infrastructure capable of assimilating and supporting development by constructing large industrial zones, including urban development, to stimulate industry, generate job opportunities, and expand the inhabited area of Egypt.

As political and economic reforms evolved, Egypt entered into the Middle East peace process and continued to practice its fundamental leading role to reach a just and sustainable settlement for the longest regional conflict in modern history, in order to create an economic environment conducive to attracting investment to the region in the spirit of peace, and culture of development.

All this would have been impossible to accomplish if we had not been deeply engaged in the ICT revolution and made use of its applications and tools to serve sustainable development in areas such as E-culture and E-science, E-business, and services such as E-learning and E-health. Such a revolution would harness ICT to serve sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Egypt took its first steps in building an information and knowledge-based society as part of its larger endeavor to create a contemporary society with a unique geographical location that facilitates communication links between Africa, Asia, and Europe, as well as an accumulation of experience and knowledge that has been benefiting the world for over seven thousand years. Upholding the torch of civilization and progress, Egypt is, and has always been, a centre of culture, science, and arts, effectively contributing to the shaping of the knowledge society. Over the past two decades, Egypt has witnessed an accelerated growth in using ICT to face the challenges of socio-economic development. A number of national projects were initiated to deploy a solid communication infrastructure, and build national databases which contributed to the success of the economic reform program, and the sound management of development issues.

Egypt's efforts to embrace the knowledge society are based on a number of points of strength, including:

1. Serious political resolve to accelerate the development of ICT industries, and expand investments to incorporate technology in pre-university and higher education.
2. Population distribution in which youth are the overwhelming majority, which is undoubtedly a rich future asset if equipped with advanced education, and enriched with culture and competitive capability. This is supported by a significant number of topnotch Egyptian scientists and innovators, living in Egypt and abroad, and who represent a world-class competitive advantage.
3. State-of-the-art high-speed communication networks that link all Egyptian cities, and are connected to the international networks, in addition to two satellites that broadcast channels in a footprint covering Egypt and the Arab region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me further pleasure to share with this selected gathering the main features of "Egypt's Vision of the Information Society", a bold integrated initiative to build and develop an ambitious information society, and establish a competent, export-oriented industry.

The Egyptian Information Society Initiative seeks to build digital bridges to help Egypt, and developing countries with similar hopes and challenges, cross the digital divide, taking our people, and those of our region, to the global Information Society:

⇒ First: E-Readiness

Egypt has witnessed a remarkable leap in communication infrastructure as it has implemented a clear, well-defined policy to deregulate communication services. The annual increase in fixed line subscribers reached one million this past year with a growth rate of 14%, and is targeted to be maintained till 2007. The number of mobile phone subscribers has also rocketed to more than one million with a 20% growth rate and is targeted to be maintained till 2007. A huge leap has also taken place in the number of internet users in Egypt; doubling 8 times to hit 2.5 million users compared to 300 thousand in 1999. It is also expected that the number of internet users will triple by the end of 2007.

The Information Society Initiative is carried out through innovative public-private-partnerships; aiming at:

- Subscription-free internet: An initiative to provide internet access on all fixed phone lines, at the cost of a local phone call. About one million Egyptian families have used this service so far since it was launched early last year.*
- A PC for every home: An initiative that enables citizens to obtain high-configuration, locally assembled home computers with suitable payment schemes. Such a model is newly introduced in order to develop the computer industry in Egypt and increase internet usage. This initiative has been widely welcomed by Egyptian citizens from all age groups.*
- ICT Clubs: An initiative that provides children and youth nationwide with the use of ICT tools by creating an ICT club in every village. Such clubs are set up in NGOs, youth clubs, cultural centers, schools, or public libraries, and are being run by trained resident youth.*

⇒ Second: E-Learning

Egypt is rich with its population, therefore, education is one of Egypt's National Projects adopted out of the belief that nurturing our human resources is a corner stone to embrace the knowledge and information society. The objective of this pillar is to raise the competitive capabilities of the Egyptian work force, nationally and internationally, spread science and knowledge using advanced interactive systems via information networks, and introduce technology to education.

Egypt is pursuing these objectives by implementing several programs; including Professional Training to increase the number of qualified people in ICT, and also introduce Certified Training Programs in cooperation with multinational companies.

⇒ **Third: E-Government**

The Information Society should be able to deliver high quality government services to the public wherever they are, and in a suitable format, in addition to improving the efficiency of governmental bodies, and involving citizens in the decision making process.

To achieve this goal, working mechanisms of government bodies had to be changed, and service systems were updated to use ICT solutions. Furthermore, all government bodies are now establishing their own websites within a unified e-government portal, and all services should be ready through this portal by 2007.

⇒ **Fourth: E-Business**

The Challenge here is to transform into a cashless, paperless society while developing the required infrastructure, as well as legislative and regulatory frameworks, spreading the use of E-business, and raising community awareness.

To face such challenges, an array of policies have been adopted; that include:

- Enacting the legislations needed to regulate e-signature and e-transactions,*
- Deploying the infrastructure that links business enterprises, the banking sector, and government bodies into an integrated system which makes the marketing and production cycle shorter hence, increasing productivity and competition,*
- Developing postal services; especially financial services, as well as Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)*

⇒ **Fifth: E-Health**

The application of ICT in the health sector aims at providing better health services to the citizens, especially in remote and deprived areas, and supporting population programs.

This requires adopting several programs: to build a national network for health records; to ensure delivery of services to remote and deprived areas; to promote and apply telemedicine; and to provide continuous training for doctors and nursing staff.

⇒ **Sixth: E-Culture**

Egypt enjoys a fascinating, rich cultural heritage. The challenge in this area has been to harness ICT tools to document such a huge heritage in a successful program that has received global appreciation. ICT has been used to document the Egyptian cultural identity in order to preserve manuscripts, archive and index artifacts, and spread awareness of Egyptian civilization nationally and internationally using electronic publishing on the World Wide Web.

An Archeological map of Egypt has also been developed to document all archeological sites and natural reservations in Egypt, as well as a database of Egyptian folklore, Arabic music, historic documents, and photographic heritage.

This project has provided Egypt with a vast experience in the field of utilizing ICT in documenting heritage and culture, and we invite other nations to benefit from this experience in preserving our global cultural heritage.

As we proceed with completing this project we are also keen on providing "Bibliotheca Alexandrina" with cutting-edge documentation technology. We would like also to announce that an initiative to document and preserve heritage in the Mediterranean region will be proposed shortly.

⇒ **Seventh: ICT Industry Development**

Finally, an important component of our information society initiative focuses on the development of an indigenous ICT industry, utilizing Egypt's competitive advantage in trained human resources, and its capabilities as a major producer of Arabic E-content. This pillar is designed to foster the creation of an export-oriented ICT industry that creates jobs in the Egyptian market.

We have realized the importance of an enabling environment and of the necessary policies to attract more Foreign Direct Investments and to grow the ICT market. The Government of Egypt has adopted further investment incentives, ratified a law for Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) and a Telecommunication Act, and has prepared a new law for E-signature.

Establishing the "Smart Village", as a state-of-the-art high-tech business park, stands as a landmark to introduce technology, attract investment to Egypt by establishing a new technology zone where multinational businesses and Egyptian small-and-medium enterprises can settle. Such businesses have the luxury of benefiting from the advanced infrastructure, in a way that creates the nucleus for an evolving regional industry.

The result of such efforts is a huge leap in investments and service exports in collaboration with multinational businesses; as they seize market opportunities in Egypt while maximizing the value-added to the economy through capacity building investments. Such ICT businesses have established national and regional centers for the Middle East and Northern Africa; to provide export-oriented products and services.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We believe that Egypt's experience is emerging as a model of a country that has a clear vision of the problems and challenges facing the developing countries in order to bridge the digital divide. We see Egypt's Information Society Initiative as the solution that could be adopted as a model to utilize ICT as a tool for socio-economic development.

In this regard, we invite all countries of the world and all stakeholders in development to reach an agreement on fresh, newly-generated mechanisms to fund projects, and to employ the experiences and success stories of developing countries. We also cordially invite you all to visit Egypt in order to witness the impact of our ICT programs on the development of the Egyptian society. Such programs are constantly supported by a profound determination to succeed, and to realize our potential to render Egypt as a major gateway and launch pad for Africa and the Arab region, and to create new channels of cooperation with all our development partners.

*Thank you,
and I wish your meeting all the success.*