WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE

(Bamako 28-30 May 2002)

The Africa Regional Meeting Preparatory to the World Summit on the Information Society was held at the Palais des Congrès in Bamako, Republic of Mali from 28 to 30 May 2002. Participating in the Conference were representatives of 51 African countries, delegates from many other countries and people representing African and global organizations, the private sector and civil society.

Opening statements were made by His Excellency Mr Alpha Oumar Konare, President of the Republic of Mali and by His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal and current Chairman of ECOWAS.

A welcome statement from Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations was read on his behalf by Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane of ECA.

Opening statements were also made by

Mr.	Yoshio Ustumi,	Secretary General of ITU
Mr.	Boutros Boutros-Ghali,	Secretary General of the Agence internationale de la francophonie
Mr.	A W Khan,	Deputy Director General of UNESCO
Mr.	Carlos Trojan,	Ambassador of the European Commission in Geneva
Mr.	Gerard Dega,	CEO of Alcatel France
Mr.	Noah Samara,	CEO of WorldSpace and
Mr.	Amadou Top,	CEO of OSIRIS Anais Network, representing civil society organizations

Closing statement were also made by:

Mr.	Walter Fust,	Director, Swiss Cooperation and Representative of GKP
Mr.	G.O. Segond,	Special Ambassador of the World Summit
Mr.	Ahmed Mahjoub,	State Secretary, Special Representative of Tunisia

The Conference elected Mali as Chair, together with a bureau composed of five government officials representing five African states (Senegal, Tunisia, Cameroon, South Africa and Rwanda), three representatives of civil society, two representatives of the private sector and a General Rapporteur (ECA).

Following the opening ceremony, Head of delegations from African countries and regional institutions, including the African Development Bank (ADB) made official statements.

The following 14 preconference workshops and other activities were organised on 25, 26 and 27 May 2002:

- Local initiatives
- NICI strategies,
- African languages and internet
- Media and ICT forum
- Gender and ICTs
- Cultural diversity and knowledge ownership
- African NGO consultation
- Review and appraisal of ICT impact: Scan-ICT Project
- Private sector forum
- Free software: the stakes for Africa
- Law and the Web
- Local communities and ICTs
- Training of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for their participation in WSIS activities
- The National strategy of Mali

The Africa Regional Conference organised 4 workshops and a round table, namely:

- What the Information Society brings to Africa;
- What Africa brings to the Information Society;
- What Africa wants to preserve in the Information Society;
- How Africa can benefit from the Information Society: Round Table on the digital divide;
- Round Table on Africa's image in the media.

The reports of these preconference activities, the four workshops and Round Table are attached and complement the present **Declaration.**

On the basis of the outcome of the workshops and plenary discussions, **the Africa Regional Conference** adopts the following Declaration:

We, participants in the Africa Regional Conference, representing African Governments, the private sector and civil society organizations meeting in Bamako, Republic of Mali from 28 to 30 May 2002 in the presence of many invited government representatives and observers from international, governmental and non governmental organizations, do solemnly affirm that:

- The Global Information Society should address the interests of all nations, most particularly, the interests of the developing countries;

- The creation of local content should be accorded high priority;

- Communication, forming as it does the basis of individual and societal existence, should be managed in a manner that secures the fair, balanced and harmonious development of all the people of the world with particular attention to the needs and aspirations of the most disadvantaged in society and those of African people in particular;

- All partners, public, private sector and civil society organizations, more specifically small and medium size enterprises, have a stake in the development of communications and should be fully involved in decision making at the local, national, regional and international levels;

- As a matter of vital necessity, global and regional available resources should be pooled in order to extend the benefits of ICTs to all inhabitants of the world.

In this connection, the representatives of African governments, civil society and the private sector, having noted the potential of ICTs to be harnessed for African development, maintain that the following principles should guide all the thinking, which goes into articulating a common vision of the information society. These principles are of particular importance to the developing countries, especially the African countries.

1. All citizens should be provided with the means of using ICT networks as a public service;

2. Every citizen should be guaranteed freedom of expression and protected access to information in the worldwide public domain as part of their inalienable right to freely accessing the information constituting the heritage of man kind which is disseminated in all media including new multimedia systems;

3. Technology supply should be diversified through:

   - The removal of regulatory, political and financial obstacles to the development of communication facilities and tools so as to meet the specific needs of citizens in all circumstances;

   - The implementation of an operational plan of action geared to the cultural and linguistic specificities of all countries, in particular those in Africa;

   - The development of data bases on experiences concerning the introduction of new technologies that address the needs of rural areas and their capacity to pay;

   - The promotion of open source software packages that extend the life of investment and user training. Because they are provided free of charge, implementation of open source software programmes is done with minimum cost;

   - The use of voice and touch screen applications that enable a greater number of people to participate in the information society.

4. Investment and funding strategies should be pursued through assistance with content creation and democratisation of access with particular emphasis to women and the youth;

5. Multilingualism should be promoted and cultural diversity maintained as the driving force for the process of developing content for local and international use;

6. The full participation of the civil society and the private sector should be elicited at all levels of local, national, regional and international decision making related to the information society. These should be pursued by:

- Forging new forms of partnership based on complementarities among the various categories of public, private sector and civil society stakeholders;

- Establishing and/or strengthening at the local, national, regional and international levels, institutions that will create greater coherence and achieve better synergy in developing the information society.

7. Cooperation and collaboration should be enhanced through:

- Networking on best practices and experiences as a way of building the type of knowledge needed for the harmonious development of new technologies;

- The development of applications and content suited to local needs;

- The development of training plans that familiarise people with new technologies, their use and the legal framework of the information society;

- The strengthening of decentralised cooperation as one way of leveraging the reduction of the digital divide;

- The strengthening of networks that can increase individual participation in local, national, regional and international democracy.

8. Institutional, human and administrative capacity should be strengthened at the local, national, regional and international levels in order to achieve greater complementarities among all initiatives being taken to build the information society.

9. Democratic debate should be instituted on the new institutional and regulatory arrangements being made to define the social, cultural, economic, technical and ethical challenges posed by the new information and communication technologies.

10. All these principles and plans of action should be pursued within competent institutions so that the building of information society can be managed with the full participation of all the relevant stakeholders.

In this context, the **Africa Regional Conference** reiterates its full support for those global initiatives that have been adopted at the global as well as regional and continental levels.

It particularly requests the international community to give its full support to the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), the recommendations of the African Development Forum (ADF '99) and the ICT component of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In this connection, the ICT programme of NEPAD should federate all the ICT initiatives of the continent and mobilize resources for funding of the major African projects.

It further requests that the various networks and foundations working to promote the use of new information and communication technologies and to narrow the digital divide, especially the Global Knowledge Partnership and the ANAIS network be given the support and resources they need.

In view of the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society, the Africa Regional Conference of Bamako has considered :

A. What the information society could bring to Africa:

    In that context, the <u>Africa Regional Conference</u> requests that:

- Africa should benefit, in the framework of NEPAD from the immediate, massive and coordinated mobilisation of all the development partners to provide such financing as would guarantee public service, universal access and content creation that address the essential needs of the people of Africa;

- The <u>establishment</u> before the second Prepcom meeting of the Geneva Summit of:

  a)   a training fund that would familiarise participants with all the issues concerning the development of the information society;

  b)   a "high level scientific committee" that will make recommendations to the second Prepcom meeting about the challenges facing the information society particularly when it comes to developing countries, especially those in Africa;

  c)   an information and advisory structure that would facilitate the participation of African civil society organisations and SMEs in the preparation of the World Summit;

  d)   a solidarity fund to secure the full and effective participation of African civil society organisations and SMEs in the preparatory process.

- The study and promotion of relevant solutions adapted to the environment for ICTs, especially in the rural areas;

- The development of solutions and the promotion of ICT initiatives to sustain local African creativity;

- Establishment of public access points and the creation of an African backbone using innovative communication infrastructure;

- A set of concrete proposals for ICT use in education and training in Africa should be developed for submission to the second Prepcom meeting;

- The full and effective involvement of civil society and local stakeholders in developing new ICT applications should be secured;

- Pilot studies should be promoted for replication at the local, national and regional levels with the view to securing access to new ICTs at affordable cost, particularly in the rural areas.

B. What Africa can contribute to the information society

    In this connection, the <u>Africa Regional Conference</u> particularly requests that :

- The rich cultural diversity of Africa should be showcased and widely disseminated in cyberspace;

- Support should be provided to the ICT activities of the African Language Academy;

- A special fund should be set up for digitizing African archives and libraries which form the cultural heritage of the continent and can be part of Africa's contribution to the information society;

- Among other things, African fora and seminars should be organised with the objective of collecting and showcasing local experiences for the benefit of all stakeholders;

- Systematically, the specific features of Africa should be taken into account in international decision making.

C. Narrowing the digital divide

In this area, the <u>Africa Regional Conference</u> :

- Is of the opinion that narrowing the digital divide must go with the development of telecommunication infrastructure suited to the need of African people and citizens;

- Welcomes the regional and global initiatives being taken to narrow the digital divide particularly from ECA, ATU, ITU, the G8, the UN ICT Task Force, UNDP, UNCTAD, the Francophony Agency, OECD, the World Bank, the Commonwealth Telecommunication Organisation, bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies, NGOs and civil society organisations;

- Invites the traditional partners of Africa to heighten the priority to narrowing the digital divide in their development policy, particularly with the European Union under the Cotonou Agreement;

- Invites partners to study how best to optimize the cost of access to ICTs with the view to identifying the rules for organising the international connectivity market and the sharing of markets at the national level.

The Conference further requests that:

a) <u>African States should</u>:

- Contribute fully to the preparations for both phases of WSIS, namely Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005;

- adopt policies to stimulate the building of ICT infrastructure and providing universal access particularly in rural and remote areas through innovative and Africa-friendly solutions;

- fully involve African civil society organisations in the formulation of the operational strategy and implementation of the ICT component of NEPAD;

- remove duties levied on ICT hardware and software until the second phase of WSIS takes place in Tunis in 2005;

- formulate coherent national and regional policies and strategies for ICTs development (taking into account the multimedia convergence) which are likely to attract private national and international investments;

- adopt the "African charter" on radio broadcasting as a framework for the development of policies and legislations regarding information technologies and broadcasting in Africa;

- set up national committees bringing together the three components of the information society, namely the public sector, the private sector and civil society;

- actively involve the youth in national and regional ICT activities;

- ensure better gender balance in ICT use while instituting specific programmes that address the need of women particularly those aimed at rural and disenfranchised areas;

- recreate the "African news exchange";

- establish a multilateral African television network;

- invest in African media content as well as new technologies;

- develop independent production.

b) The World Summits in Geneva and Tunis should, respectively:

- adopt in Geneva, in December 2003 a plan of action for developing infrastructure suited to the needs of people and citizens of developing countries, with particular attention to African and other least developed countries (LDCs);

- adopt in Tunis, in 2005 any other additional plan of action for narrowing the digital gap that would address the needs of developing countries, particularly those in Africa;

c) Bilateral and multilateral funding agencies should:

- pay particular attention to financing infrastructure facilities and content suited to the needs of the people and citizens;

- pay particular attention to the involvement of the representatives of the civil society in all decisions relating to ICT development.

d) <u>Development partners:</u>

  - pay particular attention to human resources training and development, particularly teachers and students so as to promote content and infrastructure development with the view to facilitate the emergence of an African service industry based on ICTs;

  - contribute to the forging of innovative and constructive partnerships among donors, public authorities, the private sector and civil society in order to develop ICTs and content and build the infrastructure.

e) <u>Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations should:</u>

  - actively and effectively promote and implement concrete projects in their respective areas of competence so that African people and citizens can fully benefit from ICTs;

  - in particular:

    - <u>ECA</u> should continue to pursue the implementation of AISI in terms of the formulation and implementation of National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) policies and strategies and the related sectoral plans;

    - <u>ITU</u> should pay particular attention to Africa in the implementation of Istanbul declaration and plan of action on the digital divide by taking into account those priority areas set out in the Yaounde Declaration;

    - <u>UNESCO</u> should mobilize all its national committees with the view to secure the participation of all stakeholders, especially civil society organisations, in the WSIS preparatory process by requesting them to submit proposals that will help the preparatory process along;

    - <u>UNITAR</u> should mobilize its teams and partners to propose training plans in consult with local stakeholders (within the context of the international centre for training local stakeholders), associations, international organizations and academic institutions in the member countries concerned;

    - <u>The Executive Secretariat of WSIS should:</u>

      o take special care to secure the participation of African civil society in the preparation of the Summit by:

        - keeping all African NGOs permanently informed in their working languages of progress made in the preparation of WSIS;

- securing the participation of civil society representative in all the national, regional or global events leading up to World Summit.

o make sure that the bureau of the **Africa Regional Conference** is able to monitor all the preparations leading to the Prepcom and the World Summit in close collaboration with the bureau of the PrepCom.

D. Instituting new forms of cooperation

As a way of narrowing the digital divide, participants in the Africa Regional Conference request that the local initiatives and experiences of local authorities in the more advanced countries should be shared with the local authorities of African countries. For that to happen, the Africa Regional Conference requests the competent bodies of local authority, particularly the World Federation of Local Authorities and the International Union of Local Authorities to commit all their members to developing decentralised forms of cooperation that will narrow the digital divide.

In this regard, the **Africa Regional Conference** welcomes the initiatives taken by the cities of Lyon, Geneva, Bamako and Tunis to promote e-governance locally and commends the Lyon initiative to organise the <u>World Summit of Local Authorities on the Information Society</u> to be held before the Geneva Summit in 2003. The Conference urges all bilateral and multilateral funding agencies and private corporations to give this initiative their full support.

Noting the personal commitment of H.E. Mr. Alpha Oumar Konare, in promoting the harnessing of ICTs for development, the **Africa Regional Conference** requests President Konare to be so kind as to accept to preside over, as Africa's candidate, under the aegis of NEPAD, the preparatory activities leading to the Geneva Summit of 10-12 December 2003 and the Tunis Summit of the year 2005.

The **Africa Regional Conference** expresses its appreciation for the support extended by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and The Fondation du Devenir to make this Regional Conference a success. It would like to single out the Swiss authorities and the European Union Commission for their financial contribution which proved crucial for the organisation of this first Regional Conference in the WSIS preparatory process.   Its appreciation goes to the Telecommunication Development Bureau of ITU, UNESCO, UNDP, UNITAR, the Agence internationale de la francophonie, the World Bank, the GKP, USAID, France, Sweden and the Republic and Canton of Geneva for their contribution.

Last but not least, the participants would like to express their appreciation to the Malian Authorities for convening this Regional Conference and the Secretariat of Bamako 2002 for organizing this event which has enabled all African States, civil society organisations and businesses to plug fully into the WSIS preparatory process (Geneva 2003, Tunis 2005).

Bamako, 30 May 2002