

THURAYA SATELLITE TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY

Your Excellencies, honoured guests,

I represent the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors. We are a group of company executives and business organizations under the chairmanship of the International Chamber of Commerce.

Our committee speaks for world business at WSIS. Today, I want to set out for you how business would like the summit to tackle its objectives.

All of us here agree about those objectives. We aspire to a worldwide information society that will drive economic growth and social progress, reduce poverty, spread knowledge and education, and encourage freedom of expression. Our information society will give meaning and hope to millions whose lives today have neither.

This coming together of so many world leaders, heads of industry, international organizations and civil society is earnest of our determination to succeed.

We have set ourselves plenty of ambitious targets for placing the whole world online. If they all can be met, the world will become a better place. The challenge will be to make it happen - and that is how history will judge WSIS.

Let us be clear: business will not be at the margins, but at the very heart of the process.

It is business capital that will finance the information society.

It is business enterprise that has been largely responsible for making information and communications technology an essential part of the fabric of life in the 21st century.

Equally fundamental is the need for partnership. Only if business and governments work together with all the other partners involved will we succeed. Partnership offers the surest road to the knowledge and empowerment that information and communications technologies deliver.

The information society we would all like to see will depend on investment on a massive scale in infrastructure, products, services, content and essential applications. Governments must therefore make sure that they encourage a climate conducive to investment, a legal, political and regulatory framework in which economic growth and development can flourish.

Investors must have confidence that their money will be put to good use and that commitments will be honoured. Companies will shy away from committing shareholders' money if they view the investment climate as hostile, perhaps because it discriminates against foreign capital or puts obstacles in the way of repatriation of profits.

Liberalization of trade, strong protection of intellectual property rights, the encouragement of research and development, provision of incentives to small and medium-sized businesses, and integrity in business and commercial practices are all part of the equation.

Let me place special emphasis on two of those requirements - strong protection of intellectual property rights and competition.

Intellectual property rights encourage freedom of expression, and ensure that competition is fair. They promote innovation and creation. The information society relies on bold innovation and a willingness to push the frontiers of technology into unexplored territory. If new ideas and methods are not safe, the information society will greatly suffer.

There has to be freedom for companies to compete on an equal basis. Users of technology must be free to choose the technology that best meets their specific needs, based on performance, quality, reliability, security and life-cycle cost.

WSIS faces a specific issue whose resolution could be decisive for the direction the summit takes - that of Internet management. Will the summit set a course for increased reliance on the private sector or towards greater government intervention?

This is an issue of prime concern and the business position is unequivocal. Business believes that the Summit must not challenge the continued private sector leadership of the technical coordination of the Internet.

We should work to evolve the existing mechanisms to ensure continued comprehensive technical coordination of the Internet.. Without this, there is a real risk that the Internet itself will degrade and fail to reach its full potential as a global communications and business medium.

Finally, one thing governments must do if the information society is to realize its potential is to make sure that their education systems measure up to its demands. To use a computer or access information using new technologies, you must first know how to read.

As WSIS gets under way, may I on behalf of all the hundreds of business representatives who have come to Geneva wish you every success.

The potential of this summit to set an ambitious and feasible agenda for the information society for decades ahead is enormous. Whether it does so will depend on whether WSIS can keep its feet on the ground as it reaches for the stars.