

---

**World Summit on the Information Society**  
**Geneva, 10-12 December 2003**

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PREPCOM  
TO THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF WSIS

ADDRESS BY H.E. MR ADAMA SAMASSEKOU  
PRESIDENT OF THE WSIS PREPARATORY COMMITTEE  
PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN ACADEMY OF LANGUAGES  
FORMER MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF MALI

Your Excellency, Mr President of the Swiss Confederation,  
Your Excellency Mr Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
Your Excellency, Mr President of Tunisia,  
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,  
Mr Secretary-General of ITU,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Representatives of intergovernmental organizations,  
Representatives of the private sector and of civil society,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We now find ourselves halfway through the long journey that should take us from the information society into the knowledge and shared know-how society. In order to make this journey, we have come together from all the regions of the world, including Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Pacific Asia, and eastern and western Europe. And when I say we, I refer to governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society.

All of us have come here with our dreams. Throughout our long march towards the Summit, in full awareness of the complexity of the situation, we would look to the left and to the right and see the precipices, gulfs and divides; we would see the nightmare of the world in which we now live, a world increasingly in the grip of an unprecedented level of violence that finds its way into our very homes, a world increasingly split between rich and poor, between the educated and those unable to

read or write, between those who have access to information and those to whom such access is denied, between those who have knowledge and those who do not, between those who govern and those who are governed... And it became clear to us that this situation will only become worse unless urgent measures are taken, given the conclusions drawn at Johannesburg, where the highest authorities of the world's most powerful countries concurred that in the ten years that had elapsed since major commitments had been made in Rio, the poor countries had continued to grow poorer while the rich countries had become still more wealthy...

Thus it is that we have sought to combine our dreams, learning to work together and understand one another better while respecting our respective identities, in the interests of constructing a shared vision – a vision which, as the fruit of this lengthy period of gestation, we now put forward for your high consideration:

- a Declaration of Principles which, by defining the outline and principles of this new society in the making, will serve to ensure that everyone, through their respective language and culture, has a place in this new world of virtual communication;
- a concrete Plan of Action that illustrates the political will to implement this vision and put into effect the changes so long awaited by our peoples.

When one dreams alone it is but a dream, but where the same dream is shared by many it is already on the way to becoming reality!

Throughout this long march, with the national inputs at the sessions of the Preparatory Committee and with the regional conferences and the well-founded initiatives of the cities and of all the international organizations, particularly UNESCO, the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* and the Arab League, we were able to go beyond the dryness of the procedural discussions thanks to the hydration of our debates by the many contributions focusing on our true purpose. And we did so while adhering to principles founded on the fundamental values of inclusion, partnership and solidarity, in which regard, it gives me pleasure to hail the emergence of an almost institutional partnership between civil society, through its International Bureau, the private sector, through the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors, and governments, through the Bureau of the Summit Preparatory Committee.

This is the right moment for me to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to the result that we have now achieved through our joint efforts: to the President of the Swiss Confederation and all of the team from the host country for this first phase; to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and his colleagues; to the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union and all his staff; to the Director of the Executive Secretariat of the Summit and all his team; to the team from Tunisia, the country that will be hosting the second phase; and, of course, to all the participants in the preparatory process.

What we have together succeeded in bringing about is a new spirit of cooperation and of openness towards others!

Today, here in Geneva, we are marking the beginning of a process as we consider how to place the digital revolution at the service of human development based on solidarity.

Tomorrow, in Tunis, if God so wishes, we shall consolidate the approaches derived from this first phase while working to broaden our vision.

Indeed, the ambition of the World Summit on the Information Society, which clearly involves a societal project of global proportions, represents an immense challenge. And beyond all of the technological and social considerations, a vision is emerging that is even more all-encompassing.

If it is true that the information society enables information and knowledge to circulate freely around the planet, and that all the members of humankind are now in a position to share their

knowledge and know-how, and if it is true that the creation and dissemination of educational, scientific, cultural, news and entertainment content have become a possibility for all peoples everywhere, then we can now look forward to a new solidarity among human beings, social groups and nations worldwide – a solidarity based on the sharing of knowledge; a genuine solidarity founded on a better awareness of others and on mutual respect.

It is here that the concept of “digital solidarity” that we are advocating together with President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal comes into its own.

It is here, too, that the tremendous scope of this new type of summit becomes evident, in terms not only of the desire for integration on the part of all the key players in the information society, of the participatory approach, of the launching of new partnerships at the international level and of the vision of global solidarity among peoples and nations, but also, and above all, in terms of the political aspiration to strengthen multilateralism in a new form.

And all of this starting from the clear necessity for a shared international approach to the major problems facing our planet, for which global solutions need to be found which respect both cultural and linguistic diversity and the characteristics inherent to each of the different nations and regions of the world.

The World Summit on the Information Society thus opens the way to a new era in which United Nations summits could be convened on a regular basis to debate, in a participatory manner, current problems facing our global society which can now no longer be resolved solely within the framework of national or regional policies.

It is indeed my profound conviction that this Summit, dealing as it does with global policy for human society as a whole, could be the prelude to a new generation of summits. In this ever more globalized world it is desirable – and probably essential – that we make the qualitative leap that will take us from United Nations conferences on development issues to summits of Heads of State and Government, convened every two or three years, enabling the world’s key decision-makers, i.e. the highest officials of all the United Nations Member States, as equal stakeholders in the future of our planet, to come together to discuss the major issues pertaining to the future society in the making, on the basis of reports drawn up by the major players in the information, communication and shared knowledge society, and progressively to build this new planetary society founded on the values of solidarity and sharing.

It is now, more than ever, vital that we should combine our efforts in order to end the process of dehumanization of our planet. The World Summit on the Information Society affords us an opportunity to do that.

Let us therefore continue to work together as we pursue our journey towards Tunis and beyond, in order that this first summit of the third millennium, that could also be known as the World Summit on Solidarity, should help to transform the information society – offspring of the digital revolution – into a genuine society of human communication, knowledge and shared know-how, this being an essential condition for a new global dialogue for peace and for a new type of international communication, founded on a greater readiness to listen, exchange and share, and on more active solidarity between the nations and the citizens of our planet.

May God assist us in the realization of this great and glorious human undertaking!

Thank you for your kind attention.