Document WSIS/PC-2/CONTR/34-E
10 December 2002
English only

Australia

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) provides a unique opportunity for nations to come together to share and apply their collective knowledge, experience and resources on information and communication technologies (ICTs) to create a global eCommons.

ICTs have the potential to act as powerful tools for supporting human development and achievement, both for individual nations and for the world as a whole.

To this end, Australia supports the declaration of principles and priorities established at the International Telecommunications Union Plenipotentiary Meeting in Marrakesh and the Bucharest Declaration from the Pan-European Regional Conference on the WSIS.

Australia supports all of the principles espoused in the Bucharest Declaration, and considers principles 2, 5, 6 and 7 to be of particular importance – these are:

- Promoting universal access at affordable cost

- Setting up an enabling environment, including legal, regulatory and policy frameworks.

- Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs.

- Addressing global issues.

These principles are also consistent with the ICT goals and actions of the APEC forum.

Equitable Access

We need to ensure that the benefits from the increased use of ICTs are enjoyed by all. It is imperative that no segments within society are made worse off through not addressing constraints to their effective access.

Women in many countries, for example, tend to have lower levels of literacy, general education and ICT skills, and are less able to purchase and use ICTs. They also tend to be under-represented in decision-making on the use of ICTs. In this respect, Australia welcomes the call in the Bucharest Declaration to support women's equal access and decision-making. We need to ensure that the focus, in using ICTs, remains firmly on improving people's well-being and equal participation in the real world.

Broadband

The Australian Government is actively involved in addressing a range of supply and demand challenges in the development of broadband technologies and in maximising the social and

economic benefits from expansion nationally, particularly in key productivity sectors such as education, health and small business.

The Australian Government is currently engaged in a strategic review of broadband policy and has formed the Broadband Advisory Group to contribute to this process. The most important issue to emerge is the need for a national approach to the coordination of broadband development by establishing a National Broadband Strategy.

The focus of this work corresponds well with challenges for ICT development via broadband identified by other nations. This will provide opportunities for Australia to share information and explore the potential for cooperation with other countries.

For these economic and social benefits to be widely shared, regionally and globally, the costs of ICT infrastructure and related connectivity must also be fair and equitable within countries and across regions.

Virtual Colombo Plan

Australia has committed $A200 million to the Virtual Colombo Plan (VCP) as part of a joint program with the World Bank. The VCP is using ICTs to address key development constraints in our partner countries. The focus is on basic and higher education quality and access to information, in close consultation and collaboration with our partner countries.

Another element of the VCP is the establishment of the Australian Development Gateway, which will provide developing nations with access to an Internet platform containing relevant information in such areas as health, education, agriculture and ICTs, along with access to Australian knowledge and experts.

These efforts support goals and actions espoused in the APEC forum, as well as being consistent with principles 1 and 4 of the Bucharest Declaration:

- Securing access to information and knowledge; and

- Developing human capacity though education and training.

Enabling environment

The Australian Government has been successful in providing an effective ICT infrastructure for rural and remote communities, assisting small business with electronic commerce, and creating a culture in which the legal, regulatory, governance, technical and security issues surrounding the information economy can be addressed in an open and transparent way.

It is essential in an global and inclusive information society that the online exchange of goods, services and information is able to be done effectively, freely and securely, supported by a framework of legislation and standards that are universally respected and cooperatively managed by the entire international community.

Australia is recognised internationally as a world leader in its adoption of ICTs, in its e-government development and maturity, in its sophisticated legal and regulatory framework and in its development of standards to facilitate online trade.

Interoperability

Australia supports the Joint Ministerial Declaration on 'Electronic Commerce for Development" at the Joint UNCTAD-UNESCAP Asia-Pacific Conference held in November 2002, in particular the need for international interoperability standards to ensure effective global e-commerce systems.

Working towards open and flexible interoperability standards is an important issue for all countries. This is an essential element in promoting widespread online trade by reducing technology lock-in and by better integrating emerging and established technologies. The net effect is to reduce the cost and complexity of e-commerce to SMEs

Building Trust and Confidence

Infrastructure alone is not sufficient to stimulate the growth of viable electronic commerce or electronic government strategies. Investment in quality content and affordable infrastructure can only achieve its full potential if the networks and systems that underpin them cannot be tampered with through either mischief or malice. Only then will people, organisations, business and communities have the trust and confidence to actively participate in the information economy.

Ensuring this level of trust requires a legislative, regulatory and policy framework and a culture of governance that facilitates a cooperative and collaborative maintenance of the international frameworks essential to an environment of global online trade, data exchanges and cross-sector transactions.

eSecurity

Australia considers that in an era when all countries are increasingly interconnected to each other and to the world wide web, it is critical that all economies have the basic building blocks in place to ensure that users of ICT can employ these technologies with safety and security.

Unfortunately, we live in an era when hackers and those who spread malicious code such as viruses and trojans are making the interconnected world less, rather than more, safe.

It is therefore critical that all countries have adequate and up to date safety mechanisms in place if they are to reap the full economic and social benefits of the interconnected society that is currently unfolding. Without these mechanisms, many countries including developing countries run the risk of wholesale disruption and destruction of the computer systems on which they are increasingly dependent.

One of the key mechanisms in this area is the watch and warning mechanism operated by the various CERTs (Computer Emergency Response Teams) such as CERTcc in the USA and AusCERT in Australia.

In recognition of the need share information on threats and vulnerabilities relating to Australia's critical infrastructure, in November 2002 the Australian Government announced that it will share security information with the private sector through a new communications network or "one stop shop" on critical infrastructure protection. The Australian Government is also negotiating with AusCERT to establish an information security alerts and incident reporting scheme.

A new Critical Infrastructure Advisory Council of State and Territory government and business representatives will be established to oversee the network and to report to the Attorney-General on critical infrastructure issues.

The new network will allow the owners and operators of critical infrastructure to share information on important issues, such as: business continuity, information system attacks and vulnerabilities, e-crime, protection of key sites from attack or sabotage, threats to water supplies, and the identification and protection of offshore and maritime assets. It will involve a number of advisory groups for different business sectors. Australia is willing to share information and experience on its development of these structures and processes with other countries.

Advancing the Global Information Economy

Australia believes the principles and themes contained in the Bucharest Declaration provide a clear path ahead. Australia seeks to advance these principles by proposals in the following areas:

- Seeking to raise awareness of the importance of international interoperability standards for global e-commerce, and the feasibility of establishing a flexible and open global standards framework. The Australian Government is currently consulting with Australian industry and with international standards groups on a pilot standards framework utilising low-level technical ebXML standards for messaging and registry-repository functions. This could provide the basis for an open, reliable and scalable standard for international use.

- Development of a collaborative Global eSecurity Strategy, underpinned by the recent UN draft resolution 'Creation of a Global Culture of Cybersecurity', which in turn builds on the work of the OECD and on the work in APEC in the cybersecurity field.

Global eSecurity Strategy

The main elements of a Global eSecurity Strategy would involve:

- Universal adoption of the approach contained in the draft UN resolution 'Creation of a Global Culture of Cybersecurity';

- Promotion of the development of appropriate enhanced legal, regulatory and policy frameworks within all countries which are consistent with the UN resolution; and

- Supporting the creation of mechanisms for the early detection and warning of computer viruses, trojans, worms and other malicious computer network attacks on both public and private networks. These could be based on the proven methodologies and systems with the CERTS that have been established in a range of countries including AusCERT, which monitors and evaluates global computer threats for Australia and New Zealand. The methodology for development of this proposal could also draw upon the eSecurity work of the APEC Tel Working Group, such as the development of information seminars and of CERT guidelines and related training.

Australia looks forward to working with its neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region and with the wider global community through the WSIS process to create an information society that can progress these areas and provide benefits for all countries in the region.