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**STATEMENT OF MR. VINOD VAISH, CHAIRMAN,
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ASIAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF WSIS
(Tokyo 13-15th January, 2003)**

India is honored to have this opportunity to participate in the Asian Regional Conference for WSIS specially at this opportune time when the countries of this region have yet another opportunity to reach a consensus on how to make the deliberations in the World Summit on Information Society meaningful for the developing countries and help in solving the problems of poverty eradication, employment generation and well-being of the huge population that resides in this region.

Asia is home of over three billion people and comprises very large countries as well as many small island states. The region has more than half the world's population, including over 75% of the world's poor. Regarding ICT, nearly 600 million people worldwide have access to the Internet, of whom only about 150 million are in the Asia-Pacific Region.

In this region, the information communication infrastructure in most of the countries is weak specially in rural and remote areas and island countries, which are characterized by small markets, high costs of access and equipment, human resource constraints, limited access to networks. As a result, there are wide disparities in access to and use of the latest ICT between the countries, between urban and rural areas, between women and men, and affluent and disadvantaged sections of society.

Telecom infrastructure must be recognized as the essential backbone and a pre-requisite for bringing about an IT revolution in any society. Therefore, we need to focus attention on building up the requisite infrastructure and supportive environment to facilitate access at affordable rates in order to create the framework of an information society within our respective countries. This can only be achieved if societies are prepared to manage the change effectively.

The digital gap amongst the various countries and within the country specifically those having large geographical areas and huge populations, needs to be bridged. The regional community must take up the challenge of raising the tele-density levels to respectable levels within a set time frame. Such an approach would give meaning and direction to the goals enunciated in the Millennium Declaration. Special attention needs to be given to upgrade the existing telecom services and extending them to rural, remote areas in LDC and developing countries through international cooperation and support.

We should identify policies and programmes that will allow all sections of the society particularly women, youth and other disadvantaged groups to fully exploit the potential of information and communication technologies.

India believes that the World Summit on the Information Society should evolve a common vision and understanding based on the collective knowledge and experience of the various nations for making use of ICTs in the cause of human development particularly in combating and eradicating poverty in the developing world and to serve as a powerful tool to enable the huge populations in these countries to make use of their full potential.

Fortunately, considerable spade work has already been done in this regard in various multinational forums and my delegation would particularly like to draw attention to Decision PLEN-1 of the Plenipotentiary Conference held at Marrakesh in October 2002 where considerable degree of consensus has been reached on the declaration of the principles and Plan of Action in the context of the World

Summit on Information Society. India supports the principles and priorities established in the Plenipotentiary meeting, which are contained in Annexure-1 to Decision PLEN-1 document.

It is important that the deliberations of the Asian regional meeting provide useful inputs to Prepcorn-II which is scheduled to be held in Geneva in February 2003 for clearly identifying the themes that should be taken up for discussions during the World Summit. We need to be absolutely clear that if meaningful deliberations are to take place in the December Summit, Prepcorn-II should definitely come to consensus on most of the themes that need to be put on the agenda. Keeping in view the discussions at Marrakesh, we would like to support selection of the following themes for WSIS :-

- i) Promoting Universal Access to ICT at affordable cost. This should cover the following aspects :
 - a) Creating of necessary Infrastructure
 - b) Use of existing technologies and further development of technologies with affordability as a corner stone
 - c) Financing and investment keeping in view the sustainability aspects.
- ii) Promoting trust and confidence in the use of ICTs. This should include the following :-
 - a) Privacy and security of information in the use of ICTs
 - b) The legal and regulatory framework to achieve the above end
 - c) Establishing codes of conduct for business and enterprises
 - d) Creation of enabling national and international environment for achieving the above goal

- iii) Building human capacity. This should address issues relating to education, training and enhancing user capabilities for harnessing the potential of ICTs.
- iv) Promotion of e-application and content development keeping language and cultural diversity in mind.. Here we need not invent the wheel as a number of successful experiments have already been carried out in a number of countries in regard to use of ICT, education, health, poverty eradication, e-governance, e-commerce and early warning systems etc. These need to be taken on board in a comprehensive manner so that this information is shared by all.
- v) Role of international / regional organizations including financial and development institutions in integrating the use of ICT in the developmental process; and making available the necessary resources for this purpose.
- vi) International cooperation for promoting the global information society. This may cover the aspects like building up of partnerships between the various stakeholders, countries and institutions at national, regional and international level.