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Contribution of the Federated States of Micronesia

SECOND MEETING OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Geneva, Switzerland, 17-28 February 2003

In October at the 2002 Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union, a decision was adopted that provides the ITU input to the declaration of principles and plan of action of the World Summit on the Information Society. In December, the ITU Council Working Group on the World Summit met in Lisbon and edited the ITU contribution without making any substantive changes to the document.

The Federated States of Micronesia strongly endorses the ITU contribution to the World Summit and is pleased that it recognizes the special needs of small island developing states and other remote areas. Micronesia is submitting this contribution to PrepCom-2 to provide the details of the unique needs of small island developing states to the Preparatory Committee as it develops a plan of action for bringing digital opportunities to all people everywhere.

Oceans and seas comprise approximately 70 percent of the surface of the earth. Countless island states and island territories of larger countries are spread across numerous oceans, seas and other bodies of water. These island states and island territories are facing similar obstacles to sustainable economic development and a better quality of life for their citizens. Many of these island communities include extremely remote population centers located on islands scattered widely across hundreds or even thousands of kilometers. Isolation, distance, and a small resource base pose challenges that make it difficult for the communities and nations to develop and prosper. The World Summit on the Information Society cannot bring digital opportunities to all people everywhere unless it addresses the needs of those living on 70 percent of the globe.

We also note with considerable interest that several parties have expressed the view that the goal of implementing the principles enunciated in the Geneva Declaration can only be achieved by means of concrete projects at country level,

backed by all necessary international cooperation. Others have stated that the intervening period between the two sessions of the Summit should be devoted to developing a more detailed long-term Plan of Action. The Federated States of Micronesia strongly supports both of these views and believes if the objectives of the Geneva Declaration and the ITU input to the WSIS plan of action are to be achieved, a sustained commitment by the UN system and the international community will be necessary. Micronesia is firmly committed to the development and implementation of a National ICT Plan, including broadband connectivity to the world to provide enhanced education, training and medical services, enable the private sector to compete in the marketplace, improve the delivery of government services and provide opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment by its citizens.

Attachment to FSM Contribution

Bringing Digital Opportunities To Island States and Island Communities

Introduction

Oceans and seas comprise approximately 70 percent of the surface of the earth. Countless island states and island territories of larger countries are spread across the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Caribbean Sea and other bodies of water. These island states and island territories are facing many of the same obstacles to sustainable economic development and a better quality of life for their citizens. Many of these island communities include extremely remote population centers located on islands scattered widely across hundreds or even thousands of kilometers. Isolation, distance, and a small resource base pose challenges that make it difficult for the communities and nations to develop and prosper. The United Nations refers to this dilemma as the "poverty of opportunity" where "people's talents, skills and aspirations are frustrated and wasted, so denying them the opportunity to lead productive and satisfying lives." However, telecommunications can act as a conduit for opportunity if there is modern information and communications technology infrastructure and broadband connectivity in place. Throughout the world, today's technology is reshaping the way business is conducted, children are educated, advanced degrees are obtained, workers are trained, medical care is provided, and simply how people communicate with each other.

Worldwide, network capacity and the ability to accommodate larger applications such as broadband have become the focal points. To this end, fiber optic networks have become the backbone of today's telecommunications infrastructure. Continuing advances in optical and cable technology are enabling phenomenal increases in bandwidth, overall improvements in network capabilities, and a resulting drop in per unit transmission costs. Those advances coupled with the increase in installed fiber cable systems have resulted in the dramatic growth of services and applications involving Internet, data, multimedia, cable television, e-education and e-health. The impact of which is making telecommunications an important catalyst for economic well-being and growth, which is much needed in small countries.

The Need for Connectivity to the World

During the 1990s, many national telephone companies in island states rebuilt their domestic networks enabling thousands of families and businesses to receive improved and "first time" service. Others are still implementing new digital networks. In addition, many of these states opened their markets to competition. Yet this represents only the beginning of the telecommunications development process. Sufficient connectivity to all island communities no matter how remote and to the world has not been addressed (i.e., inter-island and international connectivity). Most communities located on remote or "outer"

islands are either without service or have only limited HF radio communications. This means doctors, students, emergency organizations, and the community at large are without access or, at best, have some voice capability. Fortunately, there are technologies and network solutions available today that can provide reasonable inter-island access to these isolated communities; networks that combine small satellite earth stations, packet based solutions, and wireless local loop systems etc.

Equally critical to island governments and telephone companies is the provision of sufficient connectivity to the international community. Most island economies are still small and developing. They rely heavily on international trade and tourism. Yet limited on-island resources and difficulties accessing global markets place local industries at a disadvantage to operate and compete. Also, the ability of schools and hospitals to provide quality education and medical care are challenged by a lack of equipment, access to resources, and professional expertise. However, by expanding global connectivity, access can be improved and applications, such as on-line, interactive, and broadband, can be implemented to help leverage limited domestic resources.

To obtain the much needed capacity and global connectivity, these islands should be given opportunities to connect to international submarine fiber optic networks. Fiber optic cable consortiums run their cables around and through island nations, often without giving small countries the opportunity to connect. This lack of opportunity is mainly due to a general lack of awareness regarding island country needs, combined with the cable industry's rush to serve large densely populated regions. The result is an unfortunate case of *"bypass"*. Currently, the vast majority of island countries must use satellite technology to communicate with the world, which generally means quality of service issues and very limited capacity. In other terms, inferior service impacts business and economic potential, and limited capacity precludes island communities from implementing broadband applications that could improve education and health services.

The Need for Information Technology and a National ICT Plan

Providing the communications infrastructure is a necessary prerequisite to being able to take advantage of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Hospitals, colleges, schools, libraries etc. need broadband connectivity to the network to effectively take advantage of the opportunities provided by the new information technologies. In addition, servers, routers and associated infrastructure need to be installed and maintained. In conjunction with the build out of the communications and information technology infrastructure, the development of a National ICT Plan is necessary to leverage resources, maximize capabilities and delivery of services in the key areas of health, education, emergency and disaster relief services, tourism, commerce, law enforcement, and government services. All levels of government, health care

providers, public and private schools and colleges, women and families, private sector users and service providers must be involved in the development of National ICT plans. Closing the digital divide is critical to the advancement of both small and large island economies, particularly in terms of educating and training its citizens, creating long-lasting jobs, providing proper health care and engaging in productive trade and commerce in the information age of the 21st century.

Obstacles to be Overcome

Four basic obstacles prevent island economies from taking advantage of the new information technologies:

- The lack of communications infrastructure to reach remote communities
- The lack of a national information and communications technology infrastructure strategy (an ICT Plan)
- The lack of a skilled workforce to install, maintain and operate the information technology infrastructure
- The lack of broadband connectivity to the worldwide network, i.e. a submarine fiber optic cable or a global broadband satellite network

In overcoming these obstacles, there are other related requirements that must be considered such as adequate power, suitable facilities to house IT equipment in a tropical environment, and human resource development. Technical training programs will need to be established to prepare a cadre of workers skilled in the installation, operation and maintenance of IT equipment. Establishing a new job market for workers highly skilled in IT will provide a major boost to island economies in and of itself.

Recognition by WSIS of Unique Island Needs

The development and implementation of a National IT Plan along with the installation of much needed ICT infrastructure is beyond the financial capabilities of most island nations. Grant funds, training programs, UN assistance and loans etc. will be necessary to extend telecommunications services to remote islands, to provide broadband connectivity to the world (i.e., international submarine cable), and to deploy broadband capabilities -- vital projects essential to closing the digital divide and to take advantage of digital opportunities. The World Summit on the Information Society must consider and initiate programs to address the unique needs of island states and island communities that are scattered widely across approximately 70 percent of the surface of the earth.

Small, developing island states and island communities must be provided with the ICT tools necessary to remove the obstacles preventing them from seeking “quality of life” opportunities now available. This is a necessity if these states and

communities are to achieve sustainable economic development in the information age of the 21st century. Developed countries and individuals are participating today in a global economy and benefiting through improved ICT services, access, and applications. Citizens rightly demand better health care, education and opportunities for economic and personal fulfillment. This should be no different for island communities where ICT would have the most beneficial impact. Deployment of new information technologies as a result of development of National ICT Plans and broadband connectivity to the world via a submarine fiber optic cable and other means can provide these opportunities. But it is all contingent on receiving the necessary assistance.