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MICRONESIA

Contribution of the Federated States of Micronesia

Third Meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society

Geneva, Switzerland, 15-25 September 2003

Draft Declaration of Principles

Throughout the World Summit preparatory process, the Federated States of Micronesia has consistently and persistently urged the Summit to recognize the unique needs and the high costs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in bringing digital opportunities to their citizens.

Micronesia strongly endorses the retention of the key principle in current paragraph 12 under the “**C. An Information Society for all: key principles**” of the Draft Declaration of Principles for the WSIS that states

“The Information Society must serve the interests of all nations and all people of the world, in a manner that secures their fair, balanced and harmonious development. Most particularly, special attention must be paid to:

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- the challenges faced by Small Island Developing States (SIDS), landlocked countries, countries with extremely difficult topography and those with unique geographic features;”

Reason: The Summit cannot see to it that the Information Society serves the interests of all nations and all people of the world unless it addresses the high costs and unique needs of the countless island states spread across numerous oceans, seas and other bodies of water that comprise approximately 70 percent of the globe. These island states are facing similar obstacles to bringing digital opportunities to their citizens, achieving sustainable economic development and a better quality of life for their citizens. Many of these island communities include extremely remote population centers located on island scattered widely across hundreds or even thousands of kilometers. Isolation, distance, and a small resource base pose unique challenges and high costs that make it difficult for these states to bring broadband digital service to their citizens.

Micronesia also believes that on page 3, in paragraph 14 of “**Our Common Vision of the Information Society**”, the sentence beginning “Accordingly” needs to be modified to state

“Accordingly, particular attention must be paid to marginalized and vulnerable groups, including: migrants and refugees, as well as other communities, unemployed and underprivileged people, children, the elderly, the disabled, indigenous peoples, minorities, and those living in rural and remote areas, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS).”

Reason:

Those peoples living in Small Island Developing States, often living in extremely remote population centers located on islands scattered widely across hundreds or even thousands of kilometers of water, are definitely marginalized and cut off from the world. They have no real access to quality health care, education, economic opportunities or a better quality of life. They are even cut off from emergency services and disaster relief because they have little or no communications with the outside world.

Draft Action Plan

More work still needs to be done to refine the Action Plan for the Summit. It is also understood that a number of new programs and projects will be announced during the first session of the Summit. If the progress of countries in connecting schools, colleges, hospitals and villages etc. to broadband service is going to be benchmarked and periodically re-evaluated, the Summit is going to have to establish technical assistance programs and see to it that there are sources of funding readily available at a nominal interest rate as well as grant programs for developing countries that are facing high costs, limited resources and limited expertise. ICT is a highly technical and fast changing world that demands highly skilled experts that understand the latest cost effective technology to enable developing countries to make wise, cost-effective decisions. If countries do not have access to appropriate expertise and well-designed programs, then a lot of time, effort and money will be needlessly wasted. Developing countries cannot afford to spend time, money and resources on poorly designed programs that will not further the objectives of the World Summit.

Micronesia strongly endorses the retention of the action item b) in current paragraph 12 on page 4 that states

b) Undertake a global programme with the objective of providing sustainable connectivity to every village and community and especially to excluded populations of developing countries with particular emphasis on the LDCs and Small Island Developing States. It would be conducted under the guidance of the competent national authorities and in partnership with the private sector and civil society, using the most appropriate and affordable technologies.

Reason:

A global programme to provide sustainable connectivity to every village and community in Small Island Developing Countries is critical to providing access to quality health care, education, economic opportunities and the possibility for a better quality of life in isolated island communities.

On page 3, paragraph 10 it states “The Information Society must serve the interests of all nations and all of the people of the world, in a manner that secures their fair, balanced and harmonious development. This will require specific actions to assist the most **vulnerable communities and countries.**” Actions a), b) and e) that follow need to be modified as follows

- a) Establishing an international fund to finance the initiation, study, and implementation of ICT projects in rural and remote areas (including Small Island developing states (SIDS), particularly in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), within three years (2006).
- b) Establishing, particularly in the LDCs, multipurpose access points in order to provide a wide range of e-services/applications in rural and remote areas, including small island developing states (SIDS).
- e) Setting up, within three years, distance training centers in rural and remote areas (including small island developing states (SIDS)), particularly in the LDCs.

Reason:

Adding language to include remote areas and small island developing states provides consistency between the wording in the Declaration of Principles and the Action Plan. These truly are the most vulnerable communities and countries.

Further, SIDS countries are often comprised of widely scattered and remote islands with a small user base; thus making ICT investments costly in terms of equipment costs, deployment and operations. In the Micronesia region, investment in telecommunications infrastructure per subscriber is four times higher than the U.S. average. In addition, operating expenses per subscriber in the Micronesia region are two to three times higher than in the U.S. These figures are not the result of inefficiencies but instead reflect the high cost of obtaining and utilizing resources and offering basic telecommunications services in relation to a small number of users. This is the dilemma – SIDS countries stand to benefit the most from ICT applications given their isolated locations and lack of resources yet such applications can be cost prohibitive. With an investment cost of four times per subscriber than developed countries and operating expenses almost three times

greater per subscriber, SIDS are going to need special assistance programs if they are going to be able to gain access to the Information Society for their people.

On page 3, paragraph 11 it states, "Advances in ICTs provide all communities and social groups with unique opportunities to enhance access to, and participation in, the Information Society. Infrastructure is central to this goal of digital inclusion..." This will require identifying relevant solutions and best technologies to guide specific actions to assist developing countries in this process. Small Island Developing States have their own unique problems and need to be provided solutions uniquely relevant to the obstacles that they are facing. Actions a), and b) that follow need to be modified as follows to ensure that this is done.

- a) Study relevant solutions for promoting the development of information and communication infrastructures adapted to the environment, and relevant to communities, with particular attention to the needs of ~~remote and rural and remote~~ areas (including Small Island Developing States), and marginalized urban areas.
- b) Produce a yearly inventory of the best technologies for access to ~~remote and rural and remote~~ areas (including Small Island Developing States) in order to optimize ICT access costs.

Reason:

Adding language to include reference to Small Island Developing States provides consistency throughout the Declaration of Principles and the Action Plan. More importantly, it is crucial that the best technologies and most relevant solutions be identified to solve the unique needs of Small Island Developing States, many of whom have rugged terrain, isolated populations separated by hundreds of kilometers of ocean and no regular communications or source of electricity.