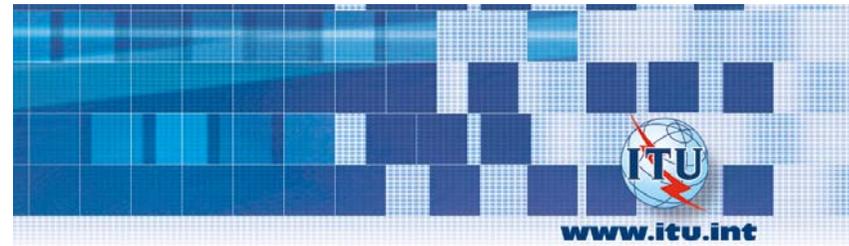"Telephones will not feed the poor, and computers will not replace textbooks. But information and communication technologies (ICTs) can be used effectively as part of the toolbox for addressing global problems. The Summit's successes now give us the necessary momentum to achieve this," said ITU Secretary-General, Yoshio Utsumi, at the close of the 2003 Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

"Building the inclusive information society requires a multi-stakeholder approach. The challenges raised – in areas like Internet governance, access, investment, security, the development of applications, intellectual property rights and privacy – require a new commitment to work together if we are to realize the benefits of the information society," he added.

Close to 50 Heads of State, Prime Ministers, Presidents, Vice-Presidents and 83 ministers and vice-ministers from 176 countries came together in Geneva to endorse a Declaration of Principles – or a common vision of an

information society's values – and a Plan of Action which sets forth a road map to build on that vision and to bring the benefits of ICTs to underserved economies.

The second phase of the Summit takes place in Tunis in 2005 and will measure the ambitious goals set in Geneva. Hard work lies ahead in the two years before Tunis, to show that the information society is on the right path. Top Summit targets now remain to be achieved, including connecting all schools, villages, governments and hospitals, and bringing half the world's population within ICT reach, all by the year 2015.

The Geneva phase clearly placed the issue of ICTs on the agenda of world leaders and produced consensus on the importance of shaping the Information Society in a constructive manner beneficial to all citizens. Leaders also agreed on the importance of ICTs in addressing many of the major social, political and economic problems and the important role that ICTs can play as an essential tool in reaching many of the goals expressed in the Millennium Declaration.
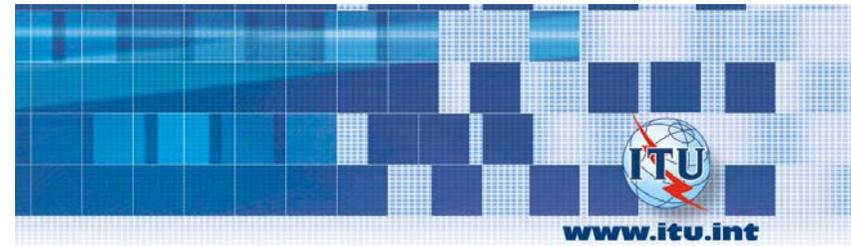
The Summit's most notable achievement was across-the-board consensus earned for a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action. The latter sets forth a firm commitment to meet concrete targets to "connect the world" and bring the benefits of ICTs to all nations.

The three-day Summit was the first multi-stakeholder global effort to share and shape the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for a better world.

The Summit also offered a genuine "venue of opportunity" in a unique meeting of leaders, policy-makers, ICT business people, voluntary and non-governmental organizations of every possible kind, and top-level thinkers and speakers. Alongside the three days of Plenary meetings and high-level round tables, nearly 300 side events helped bring the dream of an inclusive information society one step closer to becoming reality.
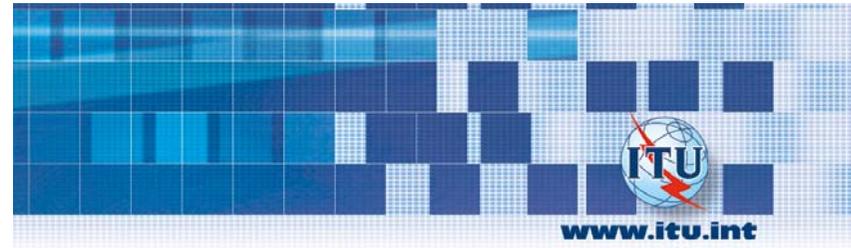
Partnership announcements included a USD 400,000 grant by the US Government for ICT development in low-income countries. Cisco and ITU also signed a Memorandum of Understanding to open 20 more Internet Training Centres in developing countries. In addition, Hewlett-Packard will provide low-cost products that will help overcome the illiteracy barrier to ICTs. Handwritten texts for example will be recognized for e-mail transmission. Microsoft, working with UNDP, will provide a billion-dollar programme over 5 years to bring ICT skills to underserved communities. One innovative initiative announced to bridge the digital divide is the Bhutan E-Post project. For faster, cheaper and more reliable communications to remote, mountainous areas of Bhutan, the Government of India will deliver e-post services to the Bhutanese Postal Service via a USD 400,000 V-satellite network and solar panels power system. The partners include ITU, Bhutan Telecom and Post, WorldSpace and Encore India. And at the very close of the Summit, the cities of Geneva and Lyon and the

Government of Senegal announced contributions totalling about EUR 1 million to fund information technology in developing countries. The contributions will represent the first three payments towards the Digital Solidarity Fund, the creation of which is to be considered by a UN working group for the second phase of the Summit to be held in Tunis in 2005.

The Summit clearly identified national e-strategies as the key vehicle to meet the targets. Connecting public places, revising school curricula, extending the reach of TV and radio broadcasting services and fostering rich multilingual content are all recognized as needing strong national-level governmental commitments. To encourage and assist national and local governments in this work, the Summit also foresees the development of international statistical indicators to provide yardsticks of

progress, exchanges of experience to help develop "best practice" models, and the fostering of public-private partnerships internationally in the interests of sustainable ICT development.

Internet governance and financing ICT investments in underserved economies were two of the issues which called for long negotiations. On the issue of Internet management, the involvement of all stakeholders and intergovernmental organizations to address both technical and public policy issues was underscored although global Internet governance is set to be the subject of more in-depth talks up to Tunis in 2005. An open and inclusive working group will be set up on the topic, in order to review and make proposals for action by the 2005 Summit.
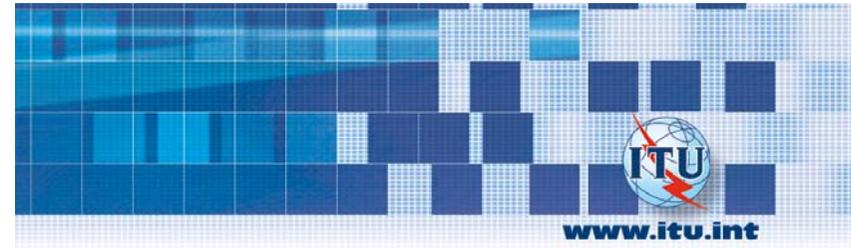
Similarly, on the issue of financing for underserved economies, a task force will be established to undertake a review of existing ICT-funding mechanisms and will also study the modalities of an international voluntary Digital Solidarity Fund.

In the areas of intellectual property rights and the need for enabling environments, universal access policies, and multilingual, diverse and culturally appropriate content to speed ICT adoption and use – particularly in the world's most underserved economies – government-level commitment to follow a set of common values and principles was attained.

"The realization of the Plan of Action is crucial to the long-term success of the Summit. We need imagination and creativity to develop projects and programmes that can really make a difference. We need commitment – on the part of governments, the private sector and civil society – to realistic targets and concrete actions. We need the mobilization of resources and investment," said Yoshio Utsumi.

"With the unique occasion of a World Summit, we have the chance to scale up our ambitions to the global level, which is equal to the size of the challenge. Let us not miss this opportunity."

See the Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action at: http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html