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world summit
on the **information society**
Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005

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>Pascal Couchepin
President of the Swiss Confederation (2003)

"What kind of society do we want for our people? How should we live together? Such questions are the daily bread of politics. The job of politicians is to reconcile ideals with what is possible. Then the possible must actually be implemented. The fact that many countries are fast becoming knowledge-based societies raises questions affecting individuals, the internal organization of States as well as international cooperation.

The first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society will take place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003. This will be a unique opportunity to develop a worldwide vision for the information society at the highest possible level. The Summit is to result in a political declaration and a plan of action. And since information and knowledge concern society as a whole, Switzerland particularly supports the involvement of civil society and business in this process.

I am very pleased that my country will host this Summit. I will do my best to ensure that the first UN summit in Geneva since Switzerland gained full membership of the UN will be a success."

>Adama Samassekou
President of WSIS PrepCom

"I thank all the governments for honouring Africa, Mali and myself, through my election to the presidency of the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society. I am honoured by the confidence placed in me and it is with determination and commitment that I shall do my utmost, with the support of the WSIS Executive Secretariat, to ensure the success of this ground-breaking Summit.

Indeed, the world is currently experiencing unprecedented and radical change due to the new information and communication technologies (NICT). A new society full of promise is emerging, the information society. However, new forms of inequality are arising at various levels, and the digital divide between industrialized countries and the rest of the world is constantly widening. There is an enormous risk of seeing the onset of an unbalanced information society, one that takes no account of the cultural wealth and the linguistic diversity of our planet.

In order to define a common and shared vision of the new information society, it is necessary for all the components of our societies to come together in a process of reflection on our common future and on the means of exploiting the advantages of the new ICT tools for the benefit of all.

Accordingly, I appeal to all stakeholders – governments, civil society, the private sector and intergovernmental organizations – to participate actively, each within their own sphere, in order to make the World Summit on the Information Society the scene of a new world dialogue, a new form of international communication based on the values of responsiveness, exchange, solidarity and sharing."

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> B a c k g r o u n d

Resolution 73 of the International Telecommunication Union (Minneapolis, 1998) resolved to instruct the ITU Secretary-General to place the question of the holding of a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) on the agenda of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination [ACC, now the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB) for Coordination] and to report to the ITU governing body, the Council, on the results of that consultation. In his report to the 1999 session of the Council on that consultation, the Secretary-General indicated that ACC had reacted positively and that a majority of other organizations and United Nations specialized agencies had expressed interest in being associated with the preparation and holding of the Summit. It was decided that the Summit would be held under the high patronage of the UN Secretary-General, with ITU taking the lead role in preparations.

In 2001, the ITU Council decided to hold a Summit in two phases, with the first phase to be held from **10 to 12 December 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland** and the second in **2005 in Tunis, Tunisia.**

The UN General Assembly **Resolution 56/183** endorsed the framework for the Summit adopted by the ITU Council. The Resolution also endorses the leading role of the Union in the Summit and its preparation, in cooperation with other interested organizations and partners.

The UN General Assembly **Resolution 56/183** further recommended that preparations for the Summit take place through an open-ended intergovernmental Preparatory Committee that would define the agenda of the Summit, decide on the modalities of the participation of other stakeholders in the Summit, and finalize both the draft declaration and the draft plan of action. It invited ITU to assume the leading managerial role in the Executive Secretariat of the Summit and invited governments to participate actively in the preparatory process of the Summit and to be represented in the Summit at the highest possible level.

In **Resolution 56/183**, the General Assembly also encouraged contributions from all relevant UN bodies and in particular the UN ICT Task Force. It further encouraged other intergovernmental organizations, including international and regional institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector to contribute to, and actively participate in, the intergovernmental preparatory process of the Summit and the Summit itself.

The complete text of the **RESOLUTION A/RES/56/183** can be found on the website *www.itu.int/wsis*

> Proposed Themes

UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 describes the purpose of the Summit as being the "*development of a common vision and understanding of the information society and the adoption of a declaration and plan of action for implementation by Governments, international institutions and all sectors of civil society*".

A series of Preparatory Committees (PrepComs) will define the agenda and themes of the Summit. A substantive input has already been made by the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference (Marrakesh, 2002), which proposes a framework with the following three objectives:

A **Providing access to ICTs for all**
How can the benefits of ubiquitous and affordable ICTs be extended to all the world's inhabitants? How can those that have access to ICTs be helped to use them effectively?

B **ICTs as a tool for economic and social development – and meeting the Millennium Development Goals**
The development of ICTs has implications for economic, social and cultural development. How can ICTs be leveraged to help promote the common goals of humanity, such as those expressed in the UN Millennium Declaration?

C **Confidence and security in the use of ICTs**
The benefits of ICTs can only be fully harnessed if there is confidence that these technologies and networks are reliable and secure, and are not misused. What steps should be taken to build confidence and increase security?
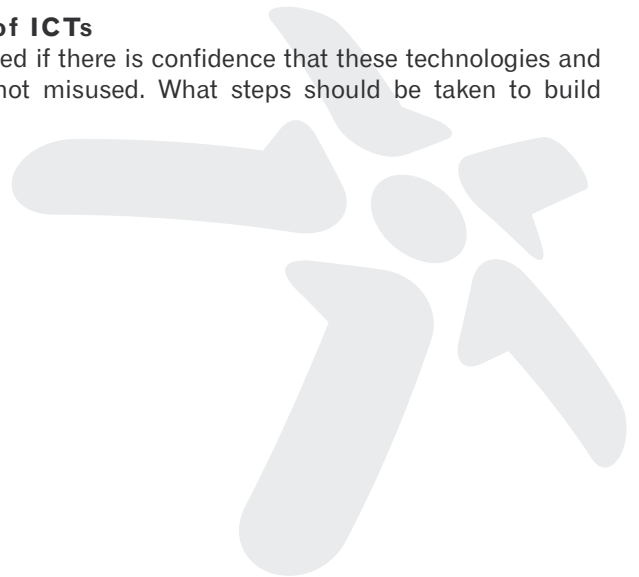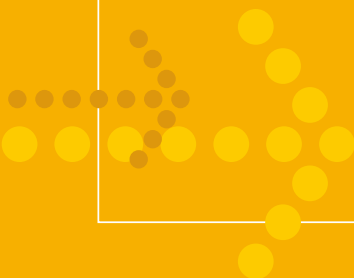
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> The Summit — Why now?

THE CHALLENGE

The global information society is evolving at breakneck speed. The accelerating convergence between telecommunications, broadcasting multimedia and information and communication technologies (ICTs) is driving new products and services, as well as ways of conducting business and commerce. At the same time, commercial, social and professional opportunities are exploding as new markets open to competition and foreign investment and participation.

The modern world is undergoing a fundamental transformation as the industrial society that marked the 20th century rapidly gives way to the information society of the 21st century. This dynamic process promises a fundamental change in all aspects of our lives, including knowledge dissemination, social interaction, economic and business practices, political engagement, media, education, health, leisure and entertainment. We are indeed in the midst of a revolution, perhaps the greatest that humanity has ever experienced. To benefit the world community, the successful and continued growth of this new dynamics requires global discussion and harmonization in appropriate areas.

> The Opportunity

The World Summit on the Information Society will provide a unique opportunity for all key stakeholders to assemble at a high-level gathering and to develop a better understanding of this revolution and its impact on the international community. It aims to bring together Heads of State, Executive Heads of United Nations specialized agencies, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations, media representatives and civil society in a single high-level event. The roles of the various partners (Governments, UN agencies, private sector and civil society) in ensuring smooth coordination of the practical establishment of the information society around the globe will also be at the heart of the Summit and its preparation.

> Who will participate?

GOVERNMENTS

All governments have a stake in the Information Society, whatever their level of national income or their infrastructure facilities. Governments are key for bringing the benefits of the Information Society to everyone through the development of national and global policies and frameworks to meet the challenges of the Information Society. In their pursuit of the public interest, governments can raise awareness, facilitate access to information for the public, and they also can lay the foundations for all citizens to benefit from Information and Communication Tech-nologies in terms of improved quality of life, social services and economic growth.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector will play an active role, in conjunction with governments and civil society, by offering an economically viable model to achieve the development objectives on the world agenda. The contribution of the private sector is instrumental in creating the material conditions for universal access to information and value-added ICT services. Its involvement in the Summit will promote economic growth, new partnerships and technology transfer, increase awareness of new technologies, and spur the creation of local content development and skilled-employment opportunities.

The private sector input to the Summit is being facilitated by a Coordinating Group of Business Interlocutors, chaired by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC).

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is playing an active role in identifying the social and cultural consequences of current trends and in drawing attention to the need to introduce democratic accountability on the strategic options taken at all levels. Its diversity and hands-on approach to issues, make civil society a key player in the renewed international partnership called for by the Secretary-General of the UN.

UNITED NATIONS FAMILY

The Summit offers a unique opportunity for the global community to reflect, discuss and give shape to our common destiny in an era when countries and peoples are intercon-nected as never before. The UN family of organizations serves as a catalyst for change by bringing together governments, as well as the private sector, international institu-tions and civil society, in pursuit of common goals. The United Nations system and its specialized agencies will be deeply involved in the organization and holding of the Summit, with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) taking a lead role.
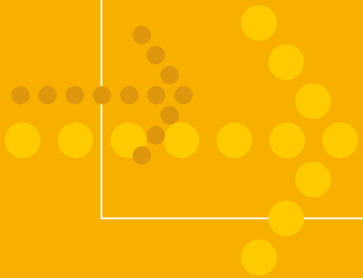
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> When and Where

The Summit is being held under the high patronage of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, with the International Telecommunication Union taking the lead role, in cooperation with other interested UN agencies, and will take place in two phases:

GENEVA 2003: *First phase*
The first phase of the World Summit will take place in Geneva, hosted by the Government of Switzerland from **10 to 12 December 2003**. It will address the broad range of themes concerning the Information Society and adopt a Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action.

TUNIS 2005: *Second phase*
The second phase of the World Summit will take place in Tunis, hosted by the Government of Tunisia, in **2005**. Development themes will be a key focus in this phase. The second phase will assess progress that has been made and refine the Plan of Action adopted in 2003.

>Preparatory Process

PREPARATORY PROCESS

The Summit in Geneva (10 to 12 December 2003) will be the outcome of a wide variety of inputs, including from previous meetings, existing Action Plans of the various partners involved and inputs from the Preparatory Committees of the Summit (PrepComs) (see Chart below). Regional Conferences and various thematic and expert meetings will be organized to consider specific subjects. Regional conferences will be held to address the specific concerns, needs and priorities of the various regions. They will be organized at ministerial level. PrepComs will be attended by governmental representatives and other stakeholders, including representatives of UN specialized agencies, the private sector, civil society and NGOs.

KEY DATES
Preparatory Committee Meetings
PrepCom 1 – Geneva 1-5 July 2002
PrepCom 2 – Geneva 17-28 February 2003
PrepCom 3 – 15-26 September 2003 (tentative)

Regional Conferences
Africa – Bamako 28-30 May 2002
Europe – Bucharest 7-9 November 2002
Asia-Pacific – Tokyo 13-15 January 2003
Latin America and Caribbean –
Bávaro, Dominican Republic, 29-31 January 2003
Arab States (location and dates to be determined)

THE OUTCOME

The anticipated outcome of the Summit is to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the Information Society, while fully reflecting all the different interests at stake. The scope and nature of this ambitious project will require partnerships with public and private entities.

>The Facilitating Mechanisms

HIGH-LEVEL SUMMIT ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

A High-Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) has been established under the patronage of Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN and Chairman of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB, formerly ACC).

HLSOC is composed of a Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Executive Heads of the following UN specialized agencies: FAO, IAEA, ICAO, ILO, IMO, ITU, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, UPU, WHO, WIPO, WMO. It comprises also the Director-General of WTO, the Executive Director of UNITAR, the Executive Secretaries of the UN Regional Economic Commissions and the President of the World Bank. The Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union serves as Chairman of HLSOC.

Its purpose is to coordinate the efforts of the United Nations family in the preparation, organization and holding of WSIS. All the members of HLSOC have committed to provide specific information about their work that will help develop the Summit themes. HLSOC reports directly to the CEB and oversees the work of the Executive Secretariat.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

The Executive Secretariat of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS/ES) was established under the authority of the HLSOC to assist in the preparation of the Summit. It is based at the ITU headquarters in Geneva. A number of different organizations, including government ministries, private companies, UN agencies and NGOs, have sent experts to the WSIS Executive Secretariat on a full- or part-time basis.

The Executive Secretariat is composed as follows:
> Executive Director: Pierre Gagné
> Deputy Executive Director: Arthur Levin
> Staff from Member States
> Staff from the UN specialized agencies participating in HLSOC
> Staff from the private sector
> Staff from NGOs and Civil Society

"I call upon all stakeholders, from governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society, and particularly those from developing countries, to join us in crafting a shared understanding and vision of the Information Society, and a corresponding Plan of Action aimed at turning the 'Digital Divide' into a 'Digital Opportunity'."

Pierre Gagné
Executive Director

HOST COUNTRY SECRETARIATS

Host country Secretariats have also been created by Switzerland and Tunisia to assist in the organization of each phase of the World Summit.

>Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
President of the Republic of Tunisia

"Tunisia is proud to be hosting the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005, where the aim will be to bring the machinery of international cooperation to bear on reducing the digital divide, modern information and communication technologies being among the main tools for promoting just, comprehensive and sustainable development.

These technologies, the mastery and proper utilization of which depend primarily on human competencies and collective intelligence, provide, particularly to developing countries, an exceptional opportunity to advance by leaps and bounds towards meeting their peoples' aspirations for progress and stability.

However, in order to achieve these justifiably ambitious objectives, there has to be a proper balance between mastery of these technologies and their use in the interests of peoples and the preservation of their identity within an intercultural framework. The active participation of civil society and the private sector is thus essential.

Firm as it is in its determination to lay the foundations for the society of learning and intelligence, Tunisia is fully capable of making an active contribution to efforts aimed at assisting the developing countries not to be outstripped by technological progress and to strengthen their presence in the global communication sector. This is one of the most important and ambitious aims to which participants in the World Summit to be held in Tunis in 2005 will be devoting their full attention.

It is our ardent hope that each stage of the Summit will be crowned with success for the good of all humankind."

>Kofi Annan
United Nations Secretary-General

"A technological revolution is transforming society in a profound way. If harnessed and directed properly, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have the potential to improve all aspects of our social, economic and cultural life. ICTs can serve as an engine for development in the 21st century, and as an effective instrument to help us achieve all the goals of the Millennium Declaration – the landmark document adopted by a record number of leaders when they met for the Millennium Summit to address the key challenges of our time.

Yet the majority of the world's population has yet to benefit from the new technology. That is why the Millennium Summit recognized the key role of partnerships involving governments, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, the private sector and other stakeholders in putting ICTs in the service of development. That is why, a year before, at the opening ceremony of the TELECOM 99 global event, I launched an appeal to governments and to the private sector to support the ITU initiative to convene a World Summit on the Information Society.

This global gathering will be a unique opportunity for all key players to develop a shared vision of ways to bridge the digital divide and create a truly global information society. It will be an opportunity to develop specific solutions and tools and adopt a realistic and viable plan of action. As I said in my report to the Millennium Summit, the digital divide can – and will – be bridged.

The World Summit on the Information Society is a crucial step towards this end."

>Yoshio Utsumi
International Telecommunication Union Secretary-General

"The spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), especially the Internet, is revolutionizing whole aspects of social, cultural and economic life. The transformation to the Information Society will be every bit as profound as was the movement from agrarian to industrial societies.

In the past, such changes have led to winners and losers. Some countries have prospered, while others have fallen behind. It could happen once again and widen the gaps if we do not take any action now. ICTs are creating many new opportunities but, because of their uneven spread, they are also creating new challenges, notably the emergence of 'digital divides'. World leaders must shape the direction of the Information Society and create a more just, prosperous and peaceful world.

The holding of a World Summit on the Information Society, in Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005, under the leadership of the International Telecommunication Union, provides a chance to develop solutions to these challenges, especially as they relate to Africa and the Least Developed Countries. The Summit is expected to produce a shared vision among world leaders, the private sector and the NGO community on how to bring about sustainable development through ICTs."

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