



**The World Summit on the Information Society  
PrepCom-2: Visionaries Panel - 17 February 2003**

**OPENING ADDRESS**

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Mr. President of the Republic of Senegal,  
Mr. President of Romania,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The history of civilization is marked by a few major turning points that have resulted in fundamental transformations through the introduction of new technologies.

Mankind first used words to communicate and create society, then he used writing to pass on knowledge and experience to the next generation. Later, distance was overcome by establishing mail systems and newspapers, and time was conquered through the telegraph and telephone and by radio and television.

As we enter the 21st century, with the introduction of Information and communication technologies, which can process, store and send information in microseconds, I am convinced that we are undergoing a revolutionary change in the society and in our everyday life.

We know from history that major changes in the past have benefited some, while creating inequalities for others. For example, the shift from agrarian economies to industrial societies enabled some countries to prosper, while others declined.

Today, and through the World Summit, the global community has the opportunity to shape the future course of the Information Society in a positive way by ensuring that the Information Society benefits all citizens.

We have the capacity to adopt measures to tackle the Digital Divide by enabling all citizens to have access to communications.

We have the prospect to ensure that modern tools of technology are used to address the problems of poverty and hunger, health and shelter.

We have the power to create an Information Society that provides new business opportunities and innovative means for citizens to meet and exchange knowledge.

We have the wisdom to ensure that the Information Society respects the interests and cultural heritage of all citizens.

To transform our hopes into realities, the Declaration of Principles and Action Plans of the Summit must have as a foundation a strong vision of the Information Society.

To develop that foundation, we are very fortunate to have five leading opinion leaders who have made time in their busy schedules to be with us today to share their vision of the Information Society.

President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal has been a prominent voice of the African continent on the need to bridge the Digital Divide. He is a leading architect of the NEPAD initiative and the Honorary Chairman of the e-Africa Commission.

President Ion Iliescu of Romania was a leader of the movement for freedom in his country. He has shown his personal commitment to the Information Society through the hosting of the regional preparatory conference in Bucharest.

Professor Lawrence Lessig of Stanford Law School is one of the leading global commentators on the legal and policy aspects of communication technologies and cyberspace. His books, such as "Code and the laws of Cyberspace" and the "Future of Ideas", have greatly influenced the debate on the framework of the Information Society.

Dr. Jacques Attali has written extensively on the Internet and its influence and is a noted thinker on a broad range of societal issues. He was the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, served as special advisor to the President of the French Republic in the 1980s and is presently the head of PlaNet Finance.

We are very fortunate to have Ms Maria Cattai as our moderator today. Ms Cattai is the Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Commerce. In that capacity, she has taken an active role in coordinating the viewpoints of the business community in the preparation of the Summit.

It is with great pleasure that I give the floor to Maria.

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