



**The World Summit on the Information Society:
Why we need it and what it can achieve**

KEYNOTE SPEECH

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Excelencias,
Señoras y Señores,

Es un gran placer, tanto a nivel personal, como para la institución que represento, participar en Punta Cana en esta conferencia preparatoria regional para los países Latinoamericanos y Caribeños en ocasión de la Cumbre Mundial sobre la Sociedad de la Información.

La República Dominicana es un lugar ideal para tal reunión y quiero agradecer al país anfitrión la iniciativa de invitarnos a todos aquí. La República Dominicana es una de las primeras economías de la región que ha adoptado la liberalización del mercado de las telecomunicaciones, la participación del sector privado y la reglamentación independiente; las tres claves de la reforma del sector.

En consecuencia ha podido aprovecharse de todos los beneficios de una economía de la sociedad de la información.

- A principios de 2003, la República Dominicana cuenta con más de un millón y medio de usuarios de teléfonos móviles y un millón de usuarios de teléfonos fijos
- Más de 500,000 usuarios de Internet y una comunidad dinámica de usuarios locales
- La espera para obtener una línea fija se eliminó hace una década y las tarifas para llamadas internacionales están entre las más bajas de la región

Hoy en día, la información es una fuente de poder y un camino hacia la riqueza. El poder de la tecnología de información y comunicación esta eliminando los límites de tiempo y de espacio, que nos han separado en el pasado.

Pero demasiadas personas en el mundo están privadas de acceso a la información y a los instrumentos para disfrutarla. Para cumplir la promesa del ciberespacio con una conciencia tranquila, debemos eliminar las injusticias de la brecha digital. La Cumbre Mundial sobre la Sociedad de la Información es una oportunidad única para desarrollar una visión compartida de la sociedad de la Información futura al mismo tiempo que estamos tratando los problemas de la sociedad de la información actual.

Es muy difícil para mi hablar en español, así que voy a continuar en inglés.

Given that the information society covers virtually every aspect of our lives, there will be many different views as to what should be achieved by the World Summit. Let me give you my own personal view of why we need a World Summit. I believe that there are essentially three reasons.

First of all, to raise awareness among political leaders, at the highest level, of the implications of the information society and the new challenges it will bring.

Secondly, to get their firm commitment to tackle the injustice of the digital divide and to recognise that access to information and communication technologies is a fundamental human right.

And thirdly to gain their political commitment to develop new legal and policy frameworks, appropriate to cyberspace.

Let me take each of these in turn, beginning with the need to raise awareness of the challenges of the information society. The industrial revolution brought many new labour-saving devices into the workplace and home. Those who could afford them, and knew how to use them, gained benefits in terms of higher productivity and increased leisure time.

In the information revolution, we use ICTs to support and enhance our ability to see, hear and communicate. We use them to enhance our learning, our knowledge base and our creativity. Again, those who can afford these tools, and can use them effectively, will reap the benefits. Wise politicians already know how to use television and the media to win elections, but many do not yet know how to make the best use of ICTs to run the government, or to extend the reach of educational programmes or medical services to their people.

Despite the fact that activities based around the creation, processing and dissemination of information already account for more than 80 per cent of employment in the developed world, in the mind of political leaders, issues concerning ICTs are not yet high on their political agenda.

For developing countries, the dawn of the information society poses the opportunity to leapfrog ahead; to be free of the constraints imposed by the distribution of natural resources or the terms of trade. ICTs can help too in nation building for those countries emerging from a troubled history.

We must help our political leaders develop a common vision of how to turn these challenges into opportunities, by using ICTs.

The second reason why we need a World Summit is to **tackle the injustice of the digital divide and to recognise that access to information and communication technologies is a fundamental human right**. While televisions, radios, fixed-line telephones and mobiles are now well-distributed, the Internet remains the most uneven of all the major global networks.

- There are more than 500 million Internet users worldwide, but 80 per cent of them are in the developed world.
- In the developing world, only one in every 50 people have Internet access compared with two out of every five in the developed world.

Fortunately, the digital divide as a whole is narrowing. In 2001, for the first time, there were more new mobile users added in the developing world than the developed one. There were four times as many fixed-line users.

The developing economies, including those here in the Latin America and Caribbean region, are continuing to grow their ICT networks, despite the global recession, as they catch up with those networks of the developed economies. The problems we currently face are due to a mismatch between supply and demand: the supply is in the developed world whereas the demand is in the developing world. The WSIS can help in highlighting the market opportunities that exist in the developing world.

Let me give you an example: the majority of email traffic from Spanish and Portuguese-speaking Latin America transits through English-speaking North America. The lack of Internet exchanges in the south of this continent leads to an inefficient system for routing traffic. These are the sorts of issues we must address.

The third issue that the Summit should address is the **need for new legal and policy frameworks for cyberspace**. Cyberspace is a new land, without frontiers and without a government yet. Cyberspace is not a parallel universe: it interacts with our own world and poses many new challenges for policy-makers. For instance:

- We are increasingly dependent on cyberspace, but how can we protect against international cyber-terrorism? Who can police cyberspace and how?
- If we pay taxes in the real world, should we also pay them for our transactions in cyberspace? And to whom? How?
- How can we control crimes conducted in cyberspace? Which jurisdiction should take precedence?

- How can freedom of expression or other fundamental human rights be guaranteed in cyberspace? Is there a danger that some would seek to control content?
- How can we build user trust and confidence in cyberspace?

There may well exist national policies and laws on these issues, but their effectiveness is limited by the fact that they only apply within national borders. Yet many of our economic transactions and our intellectual activities are already conducted in cyberspace, without clear rules and regulations.

We need a new global governance framework. Developing policy frameworks for cyberspace—to deal with issues of cyber-crime, security, taxation, intellectual property protection, or privacy—is something like establishing a new government in the New World. It is a similar process to that of the early history of colonial states in the USA. But cyberspace is an invisible world and much more complex. Its inhabitants are not only individuals but include corporations, governments and even sovereign states. They require new mechanisms for coordination. We need a much more stronger political commitments from governments to solve these issues.

We are now at a critical time in the preparations for the World Summit, which is less than a year away. In a few weeks, in Geneva, we are holding the second PrepCom. The main task at that meeting will be to develop a draft of the declaration of principles and the action plan, which will be the main outputs from the first phase of the Summit.

The basic working text to be considered will be a draft from the Chairman of PrepCom, Mr. Samassekou. This is likely to include the following main action lines:

1. **Mainstreaming information and communication technologies into development.** The Millennium Development Goals can be achieved more quickly by harnessing the full potential of information and communication technologies.
2. **Promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, local content and media development.** Cultural diversity is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Local content in a variety of languages disseminated through the media is indispensable in achieving sustainable development.
3. **Building human capacity.** It is important to develop comprehensive and forward-looking capacity building strategies, which would enable people to acquire the skills necessary to benefit from the potential of the information society.
4. **Fostering digital opportunities by extending access, connectivity and developing infrastructure.** Advances in ICTs provide unique opportunities to use the multiplier effect to enhance access and participation of all communities and social groups for improving their quality of life.
5. **Creating an enabling policy, legal and regulatory environment:** there is a need to create a transparent, competitive and trustworthy environment in order

to maximize the economic and social benefits of the information and communication technology.

6. **Building partnership and mobilizing resources for the information society:** Establishing new and innovative multi-stakeholder public-private partnerships, prioritising and mainstreaming information and communication technologies in development assistance and enhancing coordination of multilateral and bilateral initiatives.
7. **Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs.** There is a need to build confidence and security in the use of ICTs if they are to be more widely used and with greater reliability.
8. **Protecting fundamental freedoms:** the unprecedented development of the ICTs requires further action to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in particular the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The development of the action plan is critical to the 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.

In recent years, there has been no shortage of international initiatives and good intentions. But there has been a problem of scale: initiatives like the G8 DOT Force, the UN ICT Task Force, or even the ITU's own Istanbul Action Plan, simply do not measure up to the task of bridging the digital divide. Now, 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.

The arena has been prepared. To succeed, the Summit now depends on the sizeable participation of the world's political leaders at the highest level and their willingness to make firm commitments. I urge all of you present here today, experts, diplomats and policy makers to convince your political leaders of the importance of their involvement in the Summit process.

Una vez más agradezco la amable invitación.

Gracias por su atención.
