

**First International Preparatory Meeting
of the
World Summit on the Information Society**

OPENING ADDRESS

“Tunis 2005”

(Yasmine Hammamet, June 24, 2004)

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

**Mr. Secretary General of the International
Telecommunication Union,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure, at the opening of the first international preparatory meeting of the World Summit on the Information Society “Tunis 2005”, to welcome Tunisia’s guests from all participating countries, and to convey to you the greetings of His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia, and his wishes for the success of this first preparatory meeting.

Allow me in the beginning to express my thanks to Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union, and to all the members of the Summit Executive Secretariat, for the efforts they exert to ensure the success of the preparations for this world summit.

I am convinced that the complementarity of the Summit process, with its first phase in Geneva and second phase in Tunis, will offer the opportunity to address the current challenges, strengthen the bonds of international cooperation and solidarity, and open up new prospects for an optimum use of the fruits of knowledge, as part of a comprehensive approach.

While reiterating, on this occasion, the pride Tunisia takes in hosting the second phase of the world summit, organized upon Tunisia’s initiative launched

in 1998, I would like to reaffirm its determination to provide all conditions of success for this great international event, and to open the way for a wide contribution from all the concerned parties : governments, international organizations, civil society, and the business sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Joining the information society constitutes today a fundamental orientation within the Tunisian national options, which our country endeavors to materialize as part of an approach wherein the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions complement one another.

One of the characteristics of the Tunisian strategy for the establishment of the foundations of the information society consists in enlarging the scope of participation, as part of an approach that considers the ICT sector a basic element in stimulating the country's developing process and in promoting the competitive capacity of the national economy. Efforts have been focused on implementing a plan aiming at developing the communication infrastructure, establishing an appropriate legal framework, upgrading the human resources, consolidating competitiveness, and establishing an adequate framework to accelerate the pace of private investment in this field.

Premised upon the belief that the edification of the information society has deep cultural dimensions, Tunisia's efforts have been focused, under the instigation of the Head of State President Zine El

Abidine Ben Ali, on disseminating the digital culture on a wide scale and on ensuring the availability of the cultural product for all Tunisians, for it constitutes an essential factor for the promotion of the creative and cognitive potentialities, within a context of dialogue and communication with the other cultures and civilizations, as well as for the dissemination of the values of mutual understanding, tolerance and solidarity.

Given the correlation existing between the economic and social dimensions in the Tunisian development policy, attention has been focused on anchoring the principle of justice and equality of opportunities as regards access to the digital knowledge, by working to ensure a comprehensive coverage by communication services, and by establishing numerous mechanisms aiming at disseminating the digital culture among all social categories and reinforcing the opportunities, for all citizens, to be integrated within the information society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The digital divide constitutes a new challenge which faces the international community and threatens to further deepen the development disparities existing between the developed and developing countries. These disparities are unprecedented in humanity's history, especially as regards the new forms of exclusion and marginalization posed by the digital illiteracy.

In this regard, Tunisia considers that facing the challenge of bridging the digital divide depends upon the provision of a propitious environment for the establishment of the information society, by working to facilitate the access, by all countries, to digital services, and by stepping up international efforts intended to accelerate the pace of investment in knowledge, to encourage technological innovation, and to promote the mechanisms of education and training so as to foster the capacities of the human resources and to ensure their mastery of the modern technologies.

Worth pointing out in this context is the strategic role assumed by governments in elaborating policies related to the development of the ICT fields and the generalization of their use at the national levels, on the one hand, and in ensuring an efficient interaction within the globalized communication space and openness on the external world, on the other hand.

In this regard, international organizations play a pivotal role in coordinating the international positions and orientations and in contributing to the establishment of an information society based on further justice and solidarity among nations and peoples. This underlines the crucial importance of ensuring a wide participation for all these international organizations in the various phases and events related the World Summit on the Information Society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to reiterate to the representatives of the international civil society the call launched to them by His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in his speech in the Geneva Summit to intensify their participation at all the stages of the preparation for the Summit second phase in Tunis. For the civil society constitutes an essential element in building the information society, by contributing to enriching decisions and orientations, as well as by developing the programs and materializing the initiatives for the establishment of the information society.

Keen on materializing this orientation and ensuring a wider participation for the civil society, Tunisia calls for the establishment of a permanent United Nations Fund which, in a first phase, will be concerned with financing the various activities of the international civil society related to the organization of the World Summit on the Information Society, and, thereafter, will pursue the provision of support and assistance to the efforts of the international civil society in all relevant priority fields.

In this context, Tunisia will offer a contribution of 400,000 dinars, which will be essentially devoted to helping associations in the least developed countries, especially those concerned with the disabled, women and the youth, in order to facilitate their participation in the proceedings of the second phase of the Summit in Tunis.

Besides, associations desiring to participate in the international civil society fair will be offered free spaces to be used for that purpose on the occasion of the Summit.

On the other hand, Tunisia calls upon all the world's youths and the relevant associations to participate in the parallel world summit which will be organized under the motto : "The world's youths build the bridge of digital communication".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our country accords a particular attention to ensuring a wider participation for the representatives of the business sector during the Summit second phase. It exerts further efforts in order to enlarge the scope of participation of this vital sector in all preparations for this major event.

As part of the events to be organized parallel to the Summit, an international fair for creation and innovation in the ICT field will be organized, and free spaces will be offered for small enterprises acting in this sector in developing countries.

The business sector is called upon to contribute in the partnership meetings bringing together businessmen from all countries in order to implement joint projects to bridge the digital divide, as part of the North-South and South-South cooperation and partnership.

Moreover, our country plans to organize an international competition to be crowned with a prize awarded to the best enterprise acting in the field of technological innovation (Start up) in the information and communication field in developing countries, whose results will be proclaimed on the occasion of holding the second phase of the Summit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Convinced of the necessity to reinforce joint international action, Tunisia reaffirms, on this occasion, its determination to ensure the success of this Summit, for the good, prosperity, peace and stability of all the peoples of the world.

Relying on a wide participation on the part of the representatives of governments, international organizations, civil society and the business sector, Tunisia cherishes the wish that this Summit will come out with results that meet the peoples' aspirations and expectations and allow the establishment of a more balanced, just and solidarity-based society.

Wishing you today all success in your first preparatory meeting in Hammamet, we will be happy to welcome you again to Tunis in November 2005.

Thank you for your attention.