South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

SAARC Common Position for Presentation at the World Summit on the Information Society, Tunis, November 2005

We, the Information Ministers and the representatives of the Member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) met in Kathmandu on 29-30 August 2005 and agreed to submit a Common SAARC Position on issues pertaining to information and communications for consideration by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) scheduled to be held in Tunis from November 16-18, 2005.

Recalling the Resolution 73 of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, Minneapolis, 1998 and also Resolutions 56/183 (11 January 2001) and 56/528 (4 April 2002) adopted by UN General Assembly Regarding Summit on Information Society and General Assembly Meeting devoted to Information & Communication Technologies for development respectively;

Recalling the SAARC practice to coordinate the countries for their positions on issues of common interest at international and other fora;

Emphasizing the need of the commitment at the national, regional and international levels to promote knowledge on Information and Communication Technologies for the development of the SAARC region;

Recognizing that the media, film and communication are of vital importance in promoting regional cooperation;

Expressing the hope that the international community would forge cooperation at various international conferences and meetings having a bearing on issues relating to ICT including the Digital Divide;

Noting that the World Summit on the Information Society is expected to take decisions to facilitate growth of the Information Society.

Urging the World Summit on the Information Society scheduled to be held from 16-18 November 2005 in Tunis to take into account and reflect in its final outcome the following perspectives and recommendation of the SAARC Member States to:

1. Reflect the objectives and goals of WSIS in ICT related national policies plans and programs of the Member States;

2. Support implementation and follow-up of the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action by stakeholders at national, regional and international levels, with particular attention to the challenges facing the Least Developed Countries;

3. Support the Tehran Declaration on Building the Information Society and 'Regional Action Plan towards the Information Society in Asia and the Pacific' adopted at the High Level Asia-Pacific Conference for the World Summit on the Information Society in Tehran;

4. Call upon all stakeholders including governments, the private sector, civil society and regional and international organizations, to strengthen their partnerships to implement the "Regional Action Plan towards the Information Society" at the international, regional and national levels;

5. Uphold that the media has been very instrumental and effective towards creating information society and we will encourage them to do so for constructive purposes;

6. Support, in principle, that some funding mechanism be created to support the development of ICT in Low Income Countries and to review the report of the Task Force for Financing Mechanism in this context;

7. Support, in principle, that Internet Governance should be done in a more democratic way, with a role for the governments and to review the report of the WGIG in this context;

8. Develop Action Plans giving special attention to the common issues of the region;

9. Develop ICT networks in rural areas to reinforce the process of economic cooperation;

10. Treat ICT as a multi-faceted process for enhancing socio-economic development in the region;

11. Recognize that ICT is an effective tool to promote e-governance and improved services to citizens;

12. Harness the potential of ICT for social and economic development, preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity, increasing literacy rate, and access to information for all, supplementing the existing electronic and print media;

13. Set up and expand community based multi-purpose ICT centers;

14. Devise ad appropriate and legally enforceable instrument to combat cyber crime;

15. Enhance regional cooperation in the area of capacity building, research activities information sharing and human resource development;

16. Improve free flow of information in the Member States by building adequate communication networks and creating appropriate legal and institutional systems;

17. Develop regional networks and associations amongst media organizations;

18. Ensure information is accessible to everyone and technology is affordable to everyone;

19. Encourage and support public service broadcasting;

20. Encourage projection of development activities and other achievements in different fields through media in South Asia;

21. Pursue the goals, objectives and targets set in the Geneva plan of Action by WSIS and follow a specific action Plan by Member States in accordance with their means and circumstances;

22. Continue to pursue freedom of expression and plurality of media including promotion of private electronic channels with the objectives of discouraging negative projections of Member States;

23. Continue to promote peace and fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance and shared responsibilities without harming the dignity of their people through their media;

24. Invest in technological and institutional solutions to promote universal access to media;

25. Accelerate the steps to strengthen cooperation in institution building and training of media personnel;

26. Share information on technological developments and assist each other in development of regional media structures;

27. Invite international cooperation for the implementation of spelt out goals and objectives of the Geneva Action Plan under its mandate;

Further, with regard to the two specific issues of Internet Governance and Financial Mechanisms, on which the Working Group on Internet Governance and the Task Force on Financial Mechanism respectively have been established, and which are to submit their recommendations to theThird Preparatory Committee Meeting of WSIS to be held in Geneva in September 2005, the common position of SAARC is that:

(i) The Internet Governance, in recognition of the ever, increasing degree of dependence of all aspects of human society on the Internet, should be carried out with the highest degree of democracy and transparency, with the highest level of the involvement of the governments of the Member States, and

(ii) The recommendations given in Section 37 and the Financial Mechanism elaborated in Section 38 of the Note by the Chair of the Subcommittee (document WSIS-II/PC-2/DOC/11-E of Prepcom-2) are acceptable and hence supported.