UNECA

Your Excellency, President of the World Summit on the Information Society
Excellencies Head of States and Governments
Ladies and Gentlemen

Africa's economic performance, since the mid-1990s, has raised hopes of a possible
turnaround, compared to the stagnation of the previous two decades. The new trend
is largely credited to policy reforms and better governance, which are taking a hold
in many countries, where improved confidence has translated into positive
economic growth. Nevertheless this progress is still fragile and may not be
sustained if the gap between the information rich and the information poor nations
widens. The impact from new information and communication technologies is no
longer confined to the communications and information sectors. It has become a
pervasive mass technology affecting virtually all sectors of society. However at
present, some people are more distant, unacceptably so, than others, from the
opportunities of ICTs, - notably many women, many young people, the disabled and
many rural and marginal urban community dwellers. Our approaches and our
achievements must be inclusive: our point of departure should be the fundamental
right to communicate and to participate in society. This requires equity of access to
and use of ICTs.

The threat posed by the digital divide is more of an economic development problem
than a technological one. That is why in Africa we look into the matter not in terms
of access to technological resources and services only but in examining its wider
implications in socio-economic development.

There is no doubt that the opportunities of the information and knowledge economy
facilitated by ICTs is one that both big and small, developed and
less developed countries cannot afford to miss out on. African countries should take
advantage of them to facilitate their socio-economic development process.

Ladies and Gentlemen

To create digital opportunities, ECA is working with member States to develop
appropriate National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) policies
and plans in the framework of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI).
This has enabled most of the African countries to include ICT development in their
vision, their national development goals and objectives. However, in addition to
challenges posed by developing policies and plans, programme implementation may
be the greatest challenge facing ICT deployment in African countries because
Africa needs massive investments to be part of the knowledge society. We believe
the adoption of NEPAD and the implementation of its ICT component would
support African countries in their quest for digital opportunities and provide
appropriate mechanisms for further cooperation with the international community.
We call upon the international community to support Africa's effort to be part of the knowledge society by providing adequate financing on a win-win basis. The policy environment is ready; the market is open in terms of development of infrastructure and deployment of services.
Join us to build the African Information Society.

Thank you.