

## **SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS**

### **STATEMENT FROM THE TRANSITIONAL ISLAMIC GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS**

Honorable Chairman,  
Excellencies  
Respected Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen;

First of all, let me thank the Republic of Tunisia for hosting the second phase of the WSIS. I congratulate the organizers for the excellent arrangements they made for this important summit in the beautiful country of Tunisia.

During 25 years of war, the people of Afghanistan have survived some of the most horrific and appalling circumstances the modern world has witnessed. Massive devastation has left 2 whole generations of Afghans with nothing but chaos.

While ICT was newly introduced to the world, Afghanistan stayed disconnected. One can only imagine that the people of Afghanistan remain as one of the most affected by the digital gap.

But, while we remember the past, we do not remain frozen in it. The spirit, which kept Afghans alive against all odds in the past, is today's striving force to a new era of international and regional cooperation.

Our new constitution and our recent national elections are the cornerstones of our efforts to rebuild a democratic state with effective national institutions. The new Constitution, one of the most enlightened in the region, is a balanced charter that guarantees equal rights and full participation to the people of Afghanistan in all spheres of life.

Our people are fully utilizing the newly acquired constitutional rights, freedoms and opportunities. Afghan women are returning to school and to the workplace, and participating in the politics. We are experiencing successes in education, health care and development of a market economy. Kabul is one of the fastest growing city in Asia. Other major cities in the country are flourishing with business and reconstruction. The Afghan private sector has now access to the newly established international banking services. Highways are being reconstructed. Families are being reunited as three million refugees have returned to their homes and villages. People have set up more than 14 independent and privately owned radio and TV stations throughout the country. More than 270 newspapers and periodicals are published. About 5.6 million children have returned to school.

With help from the international community, we have trained a new police force of some 60,000 as well as a special force to conduct counter-narcotics operations. The new Afghan National Army, currently 40,000 strong, is increasingly taking the responsibility for security throughout the country.

The people of Afghanistan have put their trust in the international community and recognize its role in the establishment of a stable, democratic Afghanistan. Afghans recognize the benefits of this relationship and are grateful for the international security and economic support we have received over the last four years

The people of Afghanistan adopted principles of a free market economy in the new constitution and the Government has taken concrete steps to implement that vision. Thus, the growth of the private sector is a high priority for the Government. The private sector must be the driver of economic growth and reform efforts are focusing on removing obstacles to private sector development. As a result, hundreds of millions of dollars of investment have flowed into Afghanistan. Return on limited international investment in Afghanistan has been tremendously good, as evidenced by an economic growth rate of 30% last year and continuing at 20% this year, according to the World Bank.

The biggest success has been in the area of telecom and ICT. The Ministry of Communication has made significant achievements.

In 2002, with the inauguration of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, 2 Mobile operators were licensed, attracting \$300m private investment to Afghanistan. Within 3 years, the number of subscribers went from an initial 15td to 1 million today. To further emphasize on a free market society and looking at the potential of the telecom sector, the Ministry of Communication has issued 2 new GSM licenses for a total of \$80m.

24 out of 34 provincial capitals have been connected to the world via voice and data. We target to connect all remaining provincial capitals within the next month.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Where extremists have tried to build walls, we are building bridges.

The Ministry of Communication further issued 9 ISP licenses, enabling Afghans to take an active part in the information society.

Through a program called Local Fixed Service Providers License we speeded up the process of connecting our rural areas with the rest of the world.

The reconstruction of Afghanistan is a joint long term project. As ICT is one of the key factors for rapid growth and stabilization of the country, 'the Ministry of Communication realized the need for and created an ICT Council, to better coordinate efforts between state, government, private sector, donor nations, and NGO's.

Afghanistan, currently being a paper based government is striving to move towards a paper less administrative culture. Our national data center, which will be lunched in 2007, will be a major step towards our vision of e-government.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

During history, Afghanistan has stood center-stage in major regional and global events. From the conquests of Alexander the Great to the emergence of Afghan empires and from the Cold War to the global war against terror, Afghanistan's destiny has been inseparably linked with the political evolution throughout our region and, indeed, throughout the world. Commerce and trade has been one of the vital links in this chain as traders travelled the ancient Silk Road and found safe passage through Afghanistan. Just as the Silk Road enabled the trading of goods and knowledge between east and the west, Afghanistan is once more fulfilling its historic role as a bridge between cultures, countries and civilizations. The Ministry of Communication initialized the installation of a fiber optics ring across the country, with links to our neighbors Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Our fiber optics ring will connect the Trans-Europe-Asia backbone in the north with the Submarine fiber in the south and emerge as the center-stage for a digital silk road.

Our achievements so far are all in line with the agendas of the WSIS in Geneva and Tunisia and use ICT towards the social economic development of Afghanistan. Our projects promote equal access to information, betterment of individual life, stable business environments, making public services accessible, and active coordination between entities and countries.

Today in Tunisia, something unprecedented is taking place. In the true spirit of co-operation, people from all corners of the world, people from different faiths, different cultures and backgrounds, help to foster the use of ICT. It is clear that, without this co-operation, the world society would not accomplish the difficult tasks which lay ahead in bridging the digital gap.

Thank you.