

SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

STATEMENT BY H. EXCELLENCY MR. FRANCESC BONET CASAS AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNOG GOVERN D'ANDORRA

Tunis. 2005

Mr President, Mr Secretary General,
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Throughout the meetings held in recent years, we shall not be mistaken if we say that the most recurrent subjects have been:

- The policies which must be applied to reduce the digital gap
- Respect for freedom of information and expression
- Preservation of cultural identity and one's own language

It is obvious that each of these questions can be subdivided into more specific actions or policies and it is even more obvious that some of these policies can be adopted individually by each specific country.

The globalizing process of the information society cannot be blamed as a means of transmitting a situation which might tend to a culturally and linguistically homogeneous or uniform world society with the loss of national identities.

Each country can and must carry out internal policies regarding its own culture, language and obviously with respect for the freedom of expression and information, as these are basic assumptions for national sovereignty and independence, although always with the safeguard of international agreements regulating collateral aspects such as the right to artistic and intellectual property.

Consequently the regulation of the protection and development of our cultural traits is in our own hands.

Bearing in mind that the reduction of the digital gap and economic growth are linked to the round tables which have taken place prior to this meeting, it is obvious that international solidarity is and will continue to be necessary in any of its forms (economic, professional help or assessment, in education etc) to reduce this digital gap which apart from being noticeable between different countries is also patent between urban zones and rural areas.

This solidarity has been proposed with the intervention of various agents, whether internally between governments and civil society or with the participation of international organizations so that no one remains without access to the information society and its associated technologies.

To achieve the aims agreed upon during the first part of the summit, a working group was set up which contains representatives of the public and private sectors and civil society, these being considered the actors involved in the setting up of an information society bearing in mind the interests of everyone.

This working group has taken an active part in the whole process of preparing the summit and has carried out actions which have helped to develop an information society in our country which is more in key with the aim of reducing the digital gap.

One of the first actions which they carried out was to organize a meeting of small European states to describe the current situation of the implementing of new technologies in their societies. A joint declaration of the small states on the information society was drawn up which included a dozen points included in the Action plan and the Declaration of principles approved at the summit which reflected the specific problems which small states have to deal with when implementing the information society.

One of the areas considered fundamental was education. In this context various actions have been carried out. One which has had most success was the setting up of the web portal *Clau Digital* (Digital Key) to enhance the information society among the students, parents and teachers of the various education systems. We have succeeded in getting 92% of students aged from 12 to 18 to use a computer and 85% of them to have access to Internet at home.

There has also been participation in international cooperative projects to get computer materials to schools in developing countries.

We have considered respect for the environment a priority and, aware of the problem created by the production of computer waste, we have wished to promote the reuse of computer sets by setting up a second hand computer material exchange to reduce the production of waste and enable persons with less financial resources to access this technology.

Many efforts have been made to bring information and communication technologies closer to the population at large. In our country 65% of homes have a personal computer; we consider that this is a high percentage but the only way to really reduce the digital gap is to promote even more the use of information and communication technologies and to achieve this courses and help have been organized among the groups least affected by information and communication technologies, such as people aged over 50 or women. Seminars are also organized periodically to explain the new technologies and the practical applications they have in various economic and social sectors. The aim of these sessions is to make Andorran society aware of the opportunities and changes which the new technologies can bring us.

We have also wished to give special attention to the handicapped; to help them to join in using the new technologies a project has been developed which provides specific software for those with visual handicaps.

In Andorra 52.5% of the population logs on to the Internet. The working group has wished to encourage even more its use as a basic tool for everyone to be able to express his or her opinion; an initiative has been set in motion whereby all bodies and associations in Andorra have their web

page and the digitalization of books and documents is also being promoted to offer utilities of interest to the population at large.

To succeed in creating confidence in Internet users there has been cooperation with the Andorran Audiovisual Council (CAA) and the Internet Quality Agency (IQUA) to promote the quality and self regulation of the Internet by including the IQUA quality seal and the promotion of its ethical code.

One of the priority subjects for us has been to promote the use of plurilingualism on the Internet; this is why we have designed various projects the aim of which is to increase the presence of contents in Catalan and the project *Web de les cultures* (Web of cultures) has also been designed where the communities present in Andorra have a space in the portal to express themselves in their own language and make their specific traits known.

To sum up, ever since the need was contemplated to bring about this summit, we have wished to become involved in the preparatory process and the resolutions passed in the first part of the summit, trying - with the means at our disposal and also with our peculiarities as a small state - to fight to reduce the digital gap in our country and we will continue working to build day by day an inclusive information society in which everyone is born in mind.

Thank you.