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STATEMENT BY MS FAY HOLTHUYZEN, HEAD OF DELEGATION AND DEPUTY SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS

AUSTRALIA

Mr President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Australia would firstly like to thank the Government and people of Tunisia for their tremendous effort in hosting this phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, along with all the others who have worked so hard to make it a reality.

The WSIS process has provided a valuable opportunity for all stakeholders to consider vital issues posed by the emerging information society.

The Australian view of the information society is very much a positive one. We see information and communications technologies not as an end in themselves, but rather as the means to some very important outcomes. These outcomes include economic growth and prosperity, and the sharing and use of information to enhance personal expression, knowledge, understanding and social cohesion.

The Australian experience of communications policy has been one of liberalisation, reducing regulation and promoting competition.
The results of this approach have been very positive in terms of increased competition, more and better services, greater choice of content, and lower prices. Details on these outcomes are contained in a report we have prepared for this Summit to share our experience and which is published online at www.dcita.gov.au.

When it comes to content, ICTs are providing new ways of expressing our creativity and we applaud the Australians who received World Summit Awards here last night[1].

The development of the Internet in Australia has occurred largely after the liberalisation of the communications sector. Australia has never placed restrictions on the establishment of Internet service providers and market entry requirements are minimal. On generic issues like consumer protection and fair trading, emphasis is placed on general national laws.

The technical aspects of Internet regulation in Australia, such as the domain name system, have been left to industry self-regulation.

Internet use in Australia is widespread, with strong take-up by users in all sectors [2].

But these are national policies, and the future is global. We are all now moving into an era where seamless global networks, based on the Internet Protocol and related digital standards, make international cooperation more important than ever for public policy. This is why Internet governance is of such interest to all countries.

There are many dimensions to Internet governance, as the report of the UN Working Group on Internet Governance shows, and no one simple set of answers. There is clearly plenty of work for existing institutions and processes.

At the technical level, the Internet has grown to become a powerful and truly global infrastructure. It has done so in an environment which has emphasised the role of the private sector and technical experts, given civil society new means of participation and placed less reliance on governments.

Australia supports the current Internet oversight and governance arrangements, but improvements can be made. Australia believes the best approach is to retain broad arrangements that are tried and proven, and to undertake considered change from within, where this is needed. We see this as the best way to ensure that the people of the world derive maximum benefit, not just from the Internet, but from information and communications technologies generally.

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[1] Underworld (Jennie Swain, Lisa Logan), Brisbane City Council Green Home (Mark White), Vibewire (Tom Dawkins) (Youth WSA)
[2] DCITA, *State of Play 2005*, pp.7-10

Against this background, Australia looks forward to the Summit's endorsement of the ongoing evolution of the current Internet governance framework.

In Australia's view, the key issues for public policy are not about technology itself, but about how technologies are used.

One of the key issues is ensuring that the Internet can be used by all with trust and confidence. Trust and confidence are under threat from spam, phishing, spyware, viruses and the criminal activity often associated with them. By some estimates, this is costing tens of billions of dollars annually[3]. It is for this reason that Australia has, throughout WSIS, emphasised the need to develop a culture of cybersecurity to combat spam and cybercrime generally, to protect privacy and empower consumers – people-centred measures of direct benefit to everyday Internet users.

These issues can be addressed in part through national action. But we also recognise that the nature of the Internet requires such issues to be addressed on the basis of cross-border cooperation and mutual assistance. Australia has been collaborating with regional neighbours, particularly in APEC and the Pacific, to help ensure that the use of ICTs is not undermined by security threats and spam.

We hope the WSIS process will galvanise action in this area, particularly with the proposed Forum providing a valuable space for discussing these issues and building commitment to action.

As WSIS has recognised, ICTs can be effective tools in poverty reduction and sustainable development, particularly where they are integrated effectively into national development and poverty reduction strategies. In August 2001, Australia launched a $200 million ICT for Development initiative in the form of the Virtual Colombo Plan, and will continue to use ICTs in our aid program, in the context of mutually agreed development strategies that support our partner governments' development priorities.

WSIS has done much to provide a blueprint for the development of the information society. Australia looks forward to working not only with other governments, but with the full range of stakeholders – business, civil society, technical experts, academia and international organisations – to help realise this vision and the practical benefits of the information society for the people of the world.

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[3] See, for example, 'Cybercrime: Facts & Figures Concerning the Global Dilemma', an article by Chris Hale appearing in Crime & Justice International, Vol. 18, no. 65, September 2002, pp. 5-6, 24-26.

Thank you.