

SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

ADDRESS BY H. E. DR. VAIRA VIKE-FREIBERGA

PRESIDENT OF LATVIA

TUNIS, 16 NOVEMBER 2005

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Your Excellency, Mr. President Ben Ali,
Your Excellency, Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations,
Your Excellency, Mr. Secretary General of the ITU,
Fellow heads of state and government, ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to address this plenary session of the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, where Latvia took an active and leading role in preparing it. I am very pleased that this unique summit has gathered such a large number of prominent representatives from national governments, international institutions, the private sector, the research community and civil society. I sincerely hope that this summit will succeed in its goals of advancing the worldwide use of ICT-based services, by enabling citizens to take full advantage of their potential for sharing knowledge, of helping to bridge the digital divide, and stimulating social cohesion.

If we truly wish to achieve the Millennium Development Goals that we established in 2000, then the decisions taken in both phases of this summit will have to be translated into concrete actions and policy decisions. The stakes for this summit in the Tunis phase are high, particularly on such questions as Internet governance and on the financial mechanisms that will be engaged for promoting a worldwide digitally enabled society.

We are agreed that access to modern technologies should be made available in all parts of the world. But we must also work to ensure that people everywhere can benefit from the freedom to seek and receive information and to freely express their opinion. The Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for Action that our heads of state and government plan on adopting during this

Summit are important documents, as they reaffirm our common commitment to an inclusive and development-oriented society across the globe.

The information society that we have begun to create is already serving as a purveyor of such important democratic values as the protection of fundamental human rights, including the right to non-discrimination. Therefore, the regulation of this sphere of activity could have large-scale ramifications in our societies. That is why a strong sense of social responsibility for accessibility to information services must prevail in the interactions between national governments, ICT providers, non-governmental organizations and individuals.

This sense of social responsibility must serve above all to reach another common goal: a world with less inequality and a better life for the underprivileged. The industrial society that we know was characterised by heavy machinery, technology and automation, which have marked the economic progress over the last two centuries. Now our post-industrial society is evolving into an information and knowledge society. E-inclusion, e-learning, e-health and e-government are just some examples of ways and means that can provide the benefit of an information society to all populations, particularly in the developing countries. These are important endeavours that can help us to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Latvia is actively contributing to the reduction of the digital divide and the resulting social exclusion that exists, not only between the developed and the developing world, but also within each society. Since regaining its independence 14 years ago, my country has taken a number of important steps towards developing an information society. Among other measures, it is working on improving the communications infrastructure in its rural areas, implementing easily accessible e-government services, and providing education and e-skills to use them effectively. It has also built up a valuable team of IT specialists, whose qualifications have in no small measure helped Latvia to achieve one of the fastest economic growth rates in the world. We recognise that information is a valuable commodity and that knowledge is becoming a vitally significant resource for our economic development.

In the framework of the new EU i2010 initiative, a high-level ministerial event hosted by Latvia, *ICT for an Inclusive Society*, will take place in June 2006. We hope that this event will help to bring forward a new political initiative in Europe for promoting the accessibility of ICT services to a wider range of people.

This World Summit on the Information Society has been unprecedented in the United Nations system, with the involvement of various stakeholders from the public and private sectors, as well as civil society. Perhaps this summit can serve as an example for a new model of multilateral cooperation in the global world of the 21st century. Our countries face a wide array of daunting development challenges, but I am certain that by working responsibly together, we can eventually succeed in developing an inclusive knowledge society across the globe, an indispensable pillar in achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals for the benefit of more and more people everywhere.