

SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS
STATEMENT BY MR. JORELIK TIBON, SECRETARY FOR
TRANSPORTATION & COMMUNICATIONS
GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

Tunis, 17th November, 2005

Madam President,

Your Excellencies,

Heads of Delegations, Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish, on behalf of the people and Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, to thank and pay tribute to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the people and Government of Tunisia for successfully organizing and hosting the second phase of the WSIS.

The historical Geneva phase of WSIS two years ago, established the foundations of the Information Society by enunciating a shared vision to meet the global challenges of the new millennium along with a concrete Plan of Action. By so doing we embarked on a journey that will one day see all the citizens of the world join the Information Society to share and enjoy the benefits of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). Certainly it is an ambitious undertaking, but then again we need to be ambitious to move another step forward.

Indeed, the Information Superhighway is a long and winding road. Some of the world's citizens are already there; others are on the fast lane making enormous strides as we speak, while for the great majority, the journey remains an uphill battle. Geneva was an all-important first step for the world's citizens who have yet to have access to basic telecommunications services, see a television program let alone surf the world-wide-web. It is our firm expectation that here in Tunis we will join hands to take another step toward making ICT a reality for all.

We are here to address specific issues that keep us from achieving our collective vision of building a truly people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society. The Information Society is an evolving concept that has reached different levels across the world, reflecting the different stages of development. Here in Tunis we have an opportunity to take this revolution into account. Mr. President, we believe that the way forward should recognize the particular needs of different communities that make up the global community. Implementation strategies should be focused and targeted so that those in real need are uplifted into the Information Society.

To this end, allow me madam Chair, to share with this august gathering the status of ICT

development in our state, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). The RMI is a small island state of nearly 56,000 people in the Western Pacific. It is in the Micronesian region group of countries consisting of many island communities scattered across the Western Pacific. Isolation, distance and a small resource base pose challenges that make it difficult to develop and prosper. The United Nations refers to this Pacific Island dilemma as the "poverty of opportunity" where "people's talents, skills and aspirations are frustrated and wasted, so denying them the opportunity to lead productive and satisfying lives". Uniquely to our island state and other small Pacific islands, ICTs are the key to ending the 'tyranny of distance'.

International connectivity is possible via satellite communications although in the form of multiple satellite hops, whilst technological options for the delivery of services to rural and outer islands are very basic and limited. Large distances, scattered populations, small markets, and lack of human resources capacity are key constraints in building the Information Society. Adverse geographic, market and economic conditions however, have not deterred our commitment and determination in bringing ICT to the citizens of Marshall Islands. In this regard our Government adopted Vision 2018, establishing the national development road map for Marshall Islands. We are now in the process of establishing the foundations of the Information Society. Efforts are being focused on updating sector policy, expanding and modernizing the communications infrastructure, establishing appropriate legal and regulatory framework, and creating a policy environment that will enable greater private sector participation.

In terms of infrastructure development, just a month ago a new second generation mobile network was rolled out. The geographic coverage of this service includes rural and outer islands, which in turn will accelerate service penetration levels, that currently stand at 10 per 100 population. Additionally, over the last four years we have engaged in investigating the possibilities of participating in a sub regional cable network known as the Micronesian Submarine Cable Project (MSCP). Our participation in this project is premised on the belief that telecommunications can act as a conduit of opportunity if there is modern and sufficient infrastructure in place. This project holds significant promise in terms of access to international capacity and quality services with tremendous opportunities for education, health, business, value creation and access to global markets. Despite the opportunities and intentions consistent with the WSIS principles, a small communications market and economic realities stand in the way of realizing this project. This project highlights the unique situation, in particular the obstacles the RMI and small island states are confronted with in building the essential information infrastructure.

Given the enormity of financial resources required to build and sustain the information infrastructure, innovative financing mechanisms including the possibilities of direct and targeted funding should be considered in the "financial package" of the Summit. To this end, we welcome the establishment of the Digital Solidarity Fund and other initiatives and measures proposed under phase two of the WSIS process. We further submit however, that the private sector and all development partners recognize the dilemma of small economies and in considering project financing attach greater significance to the wider public good to humanity as advanced through this process and not limit consideration merely to financial considerations, if the WSIS and the vision for ICT for all will be of any relevance and meaning to small economies.

We are fully aware of the other pending issue on Internet Governance that has been the subject of much debate since Geneva and remain cognizant of that fact that Tunis presents an opportunity for making further progress keeping in mind our common goal for a "global village".

In concluding, madam President, RMI believes that development of ICTs can be accelerated, by selection of appropriate mechanisms for international cooperation and it is our firm expectation that Tunis will open up new prospects and opportunities that will enable the RMI take its place in the Information Society.

Thank you for your attention.