SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

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Tunis, 16th November 2005

It is indeed an honour for me to address the Tunis Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). May I use this opportunity to express my profound appreciation and gratitude to my dear brother, His Excellency Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia for the wonderful hospitality accorded me and my delegation since our arrival in Tunis. I also wish to commend the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, International Telecommunication Union Secretary-General, Mr. Yoshio Utsumi and all their staff for the excellent preparations made for this Summit. In the same vein, let me also congratulate the President and other officials elected to guide the work of our Summit.

At the Geneva Phase of the Summit, we set for ourselves in the Declaration and Plan of Action, a common desire, commitment and goals to create and achieve an all inclusive, people- and development- oriented Information Society, where peoples can achieve their full potential to promote development. We agreed to work towards a win-win situation, where Information and Communication Technologies will become available to all peoples, in order to assist them achieve socioeconomic development.

Achieving this objective would require the dismantling of obstacles militating against the empowerment of poor communities and nations; check prohibitive prices of technology and products; expand access to training and ensure that opportunities are available to all.

Our coming together today demonstrates our commitment towards surmounting the daunting challenges of the digital divide. It is our hope that the outcome of this Summit will be fully implemented in order to address the challenges of accessibility to ICT and truly turn the digital divide into digital opportunities and ensure productive and purposeful digital linkages.

We, in Africa, will take advantage of these opportunities to transform our communities. At the international, regional and national levels, we must, however, establish follow-up mechanisms for continuous assessment, monitoring and evaluation of progress to ensure comprehensive implementation, by all parties, of obligations arising from our decisions.

On the part of Nigeria, I wish to assure you all that these decisions will be incorporated into our national development plans.

Africa remains fully committed to The Global Digital Solidarity Fund, which is a voluntary commitment of stakeholders that is complementary and not in competition with existing funding mechanisms. We are convinced that the Fund will, among other benefits, make significant contributions to addressing the exclusion of rural and local communities in the digital revolution. The Fund will soon begin to finance the implementation of projects in Africa, Latin America and Caribbean countries in accordance with its guidelines. I note with pleasure that the High-Level segment of the 60th Session of the United Nations General Assembly welcomed the Digital Solidarity Fund.

During the inauguration of the DSF, I pledged a contribution of Euros 500,000 on behalf of Nigeria. I also pledged logistical and administrative support for the operation of the Fund. I want to seize this opportunity to announce that Nigeria has since redeemed the pledge to the DSF. Furthermore, I have made an offer which has been accepted to host the Africa Regional Office of the DSF in Abuja. It is therefore a unique honour and privilege for me to announce that the Africa Regional Office of the DSF will take off before the end of this year. I hope that other leaders in the developing regions of Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East will make similar offers for the Fund's Regional Offices to take-off in their regions.

This Summit must strive to usher in hope for communities that are most disadvantaged in the evolving Information Society.

Both the developed and developing countries must fulfill their part of the bargain to make the world safer and more secure. One way of doing this is to assist the developing countries with funding, technical expertise and investments in addition to debt relief. On their part, developing countries also must create the required conducive environment for foreign investments, imbibe the culture of democracy, good governance, transparency and the rule of law. Information and communication technologies are central to the realization of these noble goals.

Today, the benefits of ICT are still unevenly spread between the poor and the rich, the developing and the developed nations, and the rural and urban dwellers. Much has been done but a lot more needs to be done to bridge the digital divide.

We must make special efforts to build the capacity of the majority of world citizens in the evolving Information Society. Similarly, we should, at the national, regional and international levels put in place machinery for assessing and monitoring the implementation of commitments made under the WSIS process. The present situation where the developed world that has only 15% of world population has more than 75% of Internet users worldwide is unacceptable.

The consequences and costs of the continued digital divide are not conducive for global peace, security and development. Today, the world is faced with threats of terrorism. How can we successfully win the war against terrorism when majority of the world population do not have access to ICTs which are absolutely necessary for reporting and monitoring suspicious activities? We need to bridge the gap to help us in fighting terrorism globally.

In spite of the numerous challenges to our continent, especially in the area of conflict resolution, which has taken much of our energy and resources, serious attention is given to ICT for development. We have since the first phase of the Summit made concerted efforts to integrate our national and regional plans and programmes to ensure that the benefits of ICTs accrue to our people and this has guided the participation of African delegations to the preparatory work of this Summit.

Education is the cornerstone for capacity building. In recognition of this, the African Union's New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) initiated an e-school programme with the aim of computerising about 600,000 Secondary Schools spread across the continent. Project planning has reached an advanced stage with implementation expected to start very soon. The SAT-3 international submarine cable that links most of Africa is now carrying high volumes of traffic.

In my address to the Summit in Geneva in 2003, I enumerated the efforts my Administration has made and we have since built on them to facilitate the spread of the benefits of ICT in Nigeria and beyond. Among other initiatives, we have put in place a National ICT Policy and National Telecommunication Act that liberalizes the Information and Communication sector thereby creating the necessary enabling environment for public-private partnership for ICT development.

Second, we launched a satellite for remote sensing and disaster monitoring which has generated huge volume of data now being used in project planning and implementation especially in agriculture not only in Nigeria but also in other African countries. Third, plans have reached an advanced stage to launch Nigeria's communication satellite in 2006. All these are aimed at improving service delivery, expanding access to ICT, and creating conducive atmosphere for research and development.

I want to reaffirm my government's full support and commitment to the goals and shared vision of the WSIS in building an all inclusive Information Society. It is noteworthy to state that within the past three years, the WSIS process has really impacted the development and deployment of ICTs as tool for socio-economic and sustainable development in Nigeria.

In collaboration with the ECOWAS Secretariat, Nigeria hosted stakeholders from the West African sub-region to a conference to develop best strategies for implementing the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action in the sub-region. A major outcome of the conference was the establishment of a Committee which is now working on the development of a sub-regional IT policy for West Africa.

Nigeria is in some sense in an internet revolution with the exponential increase in the number of internet providers and users, the lowering of the cost of soft- and hardware, the massive expansion in the number of telephone landlines as well as mobile phone lines, and the heavy investment in rural telephony. We are fully committed to bridging the digital divide between rural and urban communities. We also acknowledge the value and support of the WSIS process.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we have initiated a wonderful process. We must continue to work hard to build, strengthen, deepen and widen the process.

Our peoples are eager for useful and valuable information and as we know, they cannot only generate new ideas but they can also absorb, domesticate and replicate as necessary, existing technologies. Let us think together, plan together, work together and share opportunities in the interest of our peoples and humanity.

I thank you for your attention.