SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

STATEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA,

THABO MBEKI, AT THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY
TUNIS, NOVEMBER 16th 2005

Your Excellency, President Ben Ali of the Republic of Tunisia,
Your Excellency Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN,
Your Excellency Mr Y Utsumi, Secretary General of the International Telecommunications Union,
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Heads of Delegation, Ministers, distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for affording us the opportunity to participate in this important World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Let me also thank the government and the people of the Republic of Tunisia for their warm hospitality and the excellent manner in which they have organised this important gathering.

The world community of nations has recognised the fact that one of the central and urgent challenges facing humanity is the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment.

We hope that the fact that this second phase of the World Summit on Information Society takes place in Africa will further underline the need for us all to do everything possible to promote the use of modem information and communication technologies to help extricate the poor of Africa and the world from their condition of underdevelopment, marginalisation and social exclusion.

We believe that it is imperative that the decisions we take should fully reflect the desire we expressed in the Declaration of Principles we adopted in Geneva in 2003, "to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society...enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life..."

These decisions must, again as we agreed in Geneva, enable all stakeholders to work together, among other things "to improve access to information and communication infrastructure and technologies...build capacity, increase confidence and security in the use of ICTs, develop and widen ICT applications, foster and respect cultural diversity...and encourage international and regional cooperation."

In this regard, we welcome and fully support the agreed position that Internet Governance is an essential part of a "people-centred, inclusive, development-oriented and non-discriminatory Information Society", and that "we commit ourselves to the stability and security of the Internet as a global facility and to ensuring the requisite legitimacy of its governance, based on the full participation of all stakeholders".

Indeed, the creation of an inclusive and development-oriented Information Society is in the best interests of the majority of humanity because most of the peoples of the world, especially from the developing countries, are confronted by the challenge of exclusion in the context of the global economy, in whose development modern information and communication technologies play a vital role.

Accordingly, one of the fundamental challenges facing all of us is to build multilateral and multi-stakeholder institutions and systems rooted within the UN system to ensure inclusive and equitable access to ICTs within the context of an Internet Governance system that is legitimate, transparent and accountable.

We therefore agreed fully that this World Summit should mandate the Secretary General of the United Nations to convene the Internet Governance Forum to enable multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent dialogue to take place covering all relevant areas.

We also believe that we should move with the necessary speed to implement the agreement to utilise various technologies and licensing models, including those developed under both proprietary schemes and open source and free modalities to expedite access to ICTs and the elimination of the digital divide by fostering collaborative development, inter-operative platforms and free and open source software.

Our country and continent are determined to do everything possible to achieve their renewal and development, defeating the twin scourges of poverty and underdevelopment. In this regard, we have fully recognised the critical importance of modern ICTs as a powerful ally we have to mobilise, as reflected both in our national initiatives and the priority programmes of NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

We are therefore determined to do everything we can to implement the outcomes of this World Summit on the Information Society and appeal to all stakeholders similarly to commit themselves to take action to translate the shared vision of an inclusive development-oriented information society into practical reality.

Thank you.