

SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

STATEMENT FROM SRI LANKA

**ADDRESS
BY**

**H.E. MRS. SARALA FERNANDO,
AMBASSADOR/PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SRI LANKA TO
THE UNITED NATIONS IN GENEVA AND LEADER OF THE
DELEGATION OF SRI LANKA
17 NOVEMBER, 2005**

(Check against delivery)

Mr. President
Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

I have the honour to convey to this Assembly the greetings and best wishes of the President of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga who was unable to attend the Summit due to the Presidential Elections being held in Sri Lanka today.

Mr. President,

I must also extend my sincere appreciation to the Government of Tunisia for the excellent preparations made for this meeting and the warm welcome extended to all delegations, in this land of hospitality and tolerance.

The Tunis Summit brings to a historic conclusion, the largest ever multi-stake holder deliberations on information and communication technologies held over the last two years. This Summit, which has been recognized as a 'Summit of Solutions' opens the gateway for the developing world to accelerate achievements on the goals enshrined in the Millennium Declaration and the use of ICT to combat poverty and hunger, disease and environmental degradation as well as to empower people and communities.

As we approach the first anniversary of the devastating Tsunami that struck in the Indian Ocean region in December 2004, Mr. Utsumi, Secretary-General of the ITU has reminded how the use of ICT and early warning infrastructure could have saved many, thousands of lives. Taking into account the number of other tragic natural disasters experienced this year, our deliberations must have a special focus on the wider use of ICT in natural disaster prevention.

In 2003 Sri Lanka ranked in the medium access category in ITU's Digital Access Index. The challenge we face is still to bridge our achievement of high literacy rates and the great enthusiasm of our people in particular the youth in adapting to the new technology, against the unsatisfactory

penetration of ICT, especially access to the Internet, due mainly to the inadequacies of the rural electrification and telecommunications infrastructure.

The digital divide centers on the affordable access to computers, both hardware and software. Sri Lanka is embarking on a pro-choice policy with regard to the use of software and encourages users to decide on the alternatives or combination, of proprietary and free and open source software products. The Government is shortly due to launch the low cost PC initiative, the e-Sri Lanka PC, packaged with free and open source software, to create a culture of providing affordable access to technology. Significant steps have also been taken to develop local language content.

Among the several measures intended to take the dividends of ICT to the rural areas, the foremost effort in Sri Lanka is the multi-donor led e-Sri Lanka Development Project currently implemented by the ICT Agency, the apex ICT policy implementing body, under the logo 'smart people smart island' (www.icta.lk). This project is a comprehensive e-development initiative, specifically designed to address a broad spectrum of activities to foster economic growth as well as to address poverty alleviation and promote social integration and peace. A Program to establish a 1000 Telecentres throughout the country undertaken by the ICT Agency in partnership with the private sector and NGOs is taking ICT to the rural communities of Sri Lanka including the conflict affected areas, and contributes to peace building.

Sri Lanka is also a prime destination for ICT related foreign direct investment. Our software exports have grown significantly over the last few years, due to the benefits of outsourcing and in recent times we have witnessed the steady growth of the Business Process outsourcing sector. The benefits of globalization continues to open new frontiers in ICT investments in Sri Lanka and has triggered a framework of legislative measures, the latest developments being a Computer Crimes Bill presented in Parliament in August and the e-transactions legislation just approved by Cabinet.

On the subject of Internet Governance we agree with the need for the establishment of new space for dialogue for all stakeholders on an equal footing and expect that our deliberations in Tunis will enable us to reach agreement in a consensual manner, as has been the hallmark of this process over the last two years. The WSIS process has fostered a truly inclusive multi-stakeholder partnership. Let us all commit to implementing the decisions, recommendations and ideas generated by this unique Summit to establish a fair, information society accessible to all.