

SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

STATEMENT BY H.E. THE PRIME MINISTER A. T. DLAMINI (MP) SWAZILAND

Your Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of the Republic of Tunisia,
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellency UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan,
ITU Secretary General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Introduction.

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

I bring you warm and fraternal greetings from his majesty king Mswati III, the Queen Mother and the people of Swaziland. Allow me to express, on behalf of the Swaziland delegation and on my own behalf, our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the government and the people of the Republic of Tunisia for the warm reception and generous hospitality which has been extended to us since our arrival here in this historic and beautiful city of Tunis.

May I also congratulate the Government of Tunisia and the United Nations for organizing this second phase of the World Summit on Information Society, as his Excellency Kofi Annan has said, is an important forum through which we can consider how best to use this global asset-information technology.

It is almost two years since Heads of State and Government met in Geneva, to forge a common vision of building an Information Society, which will put people first and foster participation and development in our respective countries.

2. ICT development in Swaziland.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Swaziland like many other developing countries acted upon the conclusions of the first phase of the Summit.

We created an inclusive and multidisciplinary team whose mandate was to draft a national information, and telecommunications technology policy (ICT)

The drafting process drew together a wide range of stakeholders including: government, private sector, civil society, academia, to mention just a few.

I particularly like to acknowledge here the input and advice we received from external agencies such as the economic commission for Africa (ECA) and other agencies who played a pivotal role during the policy development by providing technical and financial assistance in the policy formulation process.

In drafting the policy, the Kingdom of Swaziland has taken into account the importance of capacity building at all levels of society. Since Geneva, we have witnessed a number of capacity building initiatives which have taken place through the assistance of our partners. However, a large gap in capacity still remains between developing countries, like Swaziland, and developed economies that have spearheaded the information technology revolution. We therefore, call for a closer cooperation between the developing and developed countries to bridge the digital divide.

May I point out that, the Kingdom of Swaziland has intensified the promotion of ICT programmes and through the assistance of UNDP we have introduced ICT centers in some villages with a view of bridging the digital divide between the urban and rural population.

Government has also embarked in the provision of ICT development in schools. Currently, most of our schools offer computer lessons, and already have access to internet services, of course with the assistance of cooperating partners and friends of Swaziland. In addition, all government ministries and departments now have access to computer and internet services.

The Kingdom of Swaziland encourages and supports the participation of private internet service providers and there are currently seven major Internet Service Providers (ISP's). We also have a media policy in place which enhances information flow and platforms throughout the Kingdom.

Information technology infrastructure, access and literacy are all important to development and we recognize that if we are to succeed our policies and action plans must be closely aligned with our wider social and economic development strategies.

Inclusiveness and access are important in this regard while at the same time affordability and equitability are critical considering the low income levels and poverty in the rural areas. All these efforts must also take into account people with disability and physically challenged members of our society.

3. Conclusion

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Distinguished Delegates,

In conclusion, may I once again emphasize that the Kingdom of Swaziland is committed to promote the development of ICT in the country. And we believe that, that is the only way we can compete in the global economy and markets. There is no doubt that ICT creates opportunities for all irrespective of status in society.

I thank you.