

SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

STATEMENT FROM UNITED KINGDOM THE RIGHT HONOURABLE ALUN MICHAEL, MINISTER OF STATE FOR INDUSTRY AND REGIONS

16 November 2005

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

- On behalf of the European Union and the two acceding countries, Romania and Bulgaria, I would like to congratulate the President of the Preparatory Committee and all Member States on successfully concluding negotiations last night, on what has now become the "Tunis Agenda for the Information Society".
- The European Union warmly welcomes this achievement. We recognise the Tunis Agenda as an important contribution towards what needs to be a truly global effort to bridge the digital divide: to ensure that the benefits of information communication technologies (ICTs) can be enjoyed by all. We look forward to working with all stakeholders to ensure the full and effective implementation of both stages of the WSIS process so that this truly becomes, as the United Nations Secretary General exhorted us in his address this morning, a "Summit of Solutions".
- In this context, the EU is the world's largest donor and is committed to doubling its aid budget by 2010. A growing proportion goes to developing country governments directly to support their own development plans and budgets, and they choose how much to allocate to ICT. Its importance is shown by the major role ICT is playing in the fight against HIV and Aids through activities like the popular South African soap opera "Soul City".
- Now I would like to make a few comments in my national capacity.
- In 2005, the Commission for Africa, the G8 Summit, the UN World Summit and the World Summit on the Information Society have all highlighted the important role that ICTs play in development.
- The economic and social benefits are far-reaching –connecting schools to the Internet; enabling remote rural communities to get urgent medical advice; giving farmers access to market price information. Mobile phones are now being used in developing countries to transfer cash virtually, bringing micro-credit and banking services to previously excluded poorer communities.
- ICT can enable people to participate more effectively in political processes. Thus ICT is an essential component of the participation, transparency, and good governance that are increasingly seen (for instance by the Africa Commission) as the crucial basis for development and poverty reduction.
- In this period of unprecedented change in the information society we, in government, must, with

industry, place the right conditions to encourage wider access to ICTs and foster further innovation and social and economic development.

- A good example is Bangladesh, where the Administration — in an effort to quickly expand local access to communications — partially deregulated the VSAT/satellite sector, achieving an eight-fold increase in connectivity as a result.
- In Africa, through their Regional ICT Infrastructure Programme the African Union and NEPAD aim to complete an optic fibre link around Africa and establish connections between all African countries, and to the rest of the world. It shows what can be achieved if governments, the development community and the private sector work together. The EU will play its part under the new Infrastructure Partnership with Africa.
- Our experience in the UK suggests that there are three basic principles for governments to follow:
 - First, **to avoid regulation that limits innovation.** This is important when we deal with issues such as the future framework for audiovisual content and Voice over Internet Protocol.
 - Second, regulation should deliver market stability and certainty which will attract investment based on open and competitive markets.
 - Third governments should work in partnership with industry and consumers to find, wherever possible, non-legislative solutions to deal effectively with public policy concerns. Take the example of an issue that is important to all of us: protecting children. In my country we have developed a solution that is much speedier and more effective than legislation can ever be. Industry and Government agreed that industry itself would set up a clearing house, called the Internet Watch Foundation to detect abusive images of children on the Internet. Industry agreed to work with the Foundation to remove those sites. Government agreed to hold back from legislation. Together we have achieved more through co-operation in a year than legislation could achieve in five years, and at minimum cost.
- We have exciting opportunities ahead for human progress. We need continued innovation in new technologies; stable and pragmatic policies that will attract investment; and ICTs which are relevant and beneficial to all communities – let's work together, with **all** stakeholders, to make this happen.