

**SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS**  
**STATEMENT BY H.E. ARCHBISHOP JOHN P. FOLEY,**  
**PRESIDENT, PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

**THE HOLY SEE**

November 18, 2005

Mr President:

Modern information and communications technologies (ICTs), of which the Internet is certainly the most evident expression, are now having and will continue to have a profound impact on the economic, social and cultural life of the human family.

This Summit is a unique opportunity on how to direct the "information society" toward a constructive development, and on how to avoid taking the wrong steps. What we are considering are not only "digital opportunities", but also "digital dilemmas".

This process gives us the opportunity to connect and assist those living in the poorest and most isolated regions of the world and to offer a voice to those who in the past have often been unheard and forgotten. On the contrary, if this process creates only new opportunities for those who already enjoy a good living standard and excellent communications possibilities, then our work will have been a failure.

The challenge of narrowing or even closing the so called "digital divide", the current disparity in the access to digital communications between developed and developing countries, requires the joint effort of the entire international community.

More developed countries should assume the responsibility of helping less developed nations to speed the process of computerization and access to new communications media through financial support, transfer of information technologies, commercial measures and cultural cooperation.

Just to mention an activity, even before the popularization of the Internet, the Holy See had assisted in the development of "*la Red Informatica de la Iglesia en America Latina*" (RIIAL) which has made accessible to the most remote villages of the Amazon jungle and of the Andes mountains not only current information but also cultural treasures before found only in a few libraries.

Today, much commercial activity and even interpersonal communication take place in an environment which many call virtual or cyberspace.

This new space, however, is very real indeed, and it is most important that there will not be space in it, in so far as is possible, for the tragic divisions and discrimination, the selfishness, the prejudices and the injustices that have soiled so much of human history. Such things should be remembered only to prevent their recurrence.

We are told that those who launched the World Wide Web did not seek to profit financially from its development. It is also interesting to note that an Internet that had originally been invented as an instrument of communication in war has now become a far-reaching instrument of development and of peace.

In the last major document which he published, "The Rapid Development", Pope John Paul II noted:

"The modern technologies increase to a remarkable extent the speed, quantity and accessibility of communication, but they above all do not favour that delicate exchange which takes place between mind and mind, between heart and heart, and which should characterise any communication at the service of solidarity and love" (n. 13).

It is our responsibility to fill these gaps of humanity and solidarity for the benefit of millions of people and for the next generation.

Thank you