SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

STATEMENT BY MR. ABDOULIE JANNEH, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Your Excellency, the President of the World Summit on the Information Society,
Excellencies, Head of States and Governments, Chief Executive Officers,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen

The information revolution and the extraordinary increase in the spread of knowledge has given birth to an unprecedented knowledge and information era which directly affects the economic, social, cultural and political activities of all regions of the world including Africa.

Governments worldwide have recognized, the role that information and communication technologies (ICTs) can play in socio-economic development as it affects virtually all sectors of society.

Moreover, access to information and knowledge is a prerequisite to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in turn, improving living standards for millions of people around the world.

To this end, it is important to acknowledge that our approaches and our achievements must be inclusive.

Our point of departure should be the fundamental right to communicate and to participate in society. This requires equity of access to the use of ICTs.

Already, we see the power of ICTs to stimulate and unleash Africa's economic potential being realized in a number of countries.

Farmers in Senegal can today check world markets prices of their goods by SMS text messages through mobile telephony. School children in western Kenya use digital textbooks to download lessons, whilst VSATs are opening rural South Africans to online banking led by Standard Bank.

ECA's role has been to support its member States and stakeholders in developing the appropriate policy environment whereby countries can optimize the benefits of the Information Society.

Through the National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) policies and plans within the framework of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), African countries are formulating their own vision, tied into national development goals and priorities to this effect.

ECA's support is also geared towards helping the Regional Economic Communities to harmonize ICT policies at the subregional levels in order to facilitate our regional economic integration goals.

At the same time, our work with various Civil Society groups is gathering pace and enabling a much more inclusive, development oriented approach to the creation of a shared 21St century knowledge society in Africa.

Throughout the WSIS process, ECA has, with support from the African Union and the African Ministerial Committee on ICT, assisted its constituents by organizing regional conferences, facilitating meetings of experts and managing electronic discussion lists (among other activities), to ensure Africa's engaged participation.

The WSIS process has produced several important documents, namely "Benchmarking the Information Society in Africa" and the "African Regional Action Plan on the Knowledge Economy". We believe the adoption of the Regional Action Plan, under the aegis of
the African Union, will comfort African countries in their quest for digital opportunities and provide appropriate mechanisms for further cooperation with the international community.

The same process was followed by our four sister UN Regional Commissions, (ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA) and yielded similar products.

In this regard, Mr. President, I am pleased to inform you that yesterday, the Regional Commissions, UNCTAD and the UN ICT Task Force, organized two Round Tables, respectively on "Regional Perspectives for the Global Information Society" chaired by His Excellency President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and on "Women in the Information Society: Building a Gender Balanced Knowledge-Based Economy" chaired by His Excellency President Fernandes of Equador.

Recommendations of the two Round Tables will feed into the various programmes and projects for the "After Tunis 2005" discussion and discourse. As stipulated by the various documents of the Tunis phase, the UN Regional Commissions are committed to driving the follow-up and evaluation processes after Tunis.

To conclude, I call upon member States, the International community and all stakeholders to support the implementation of the African Regional Action Plan as Africa's ICT road map from the moment when we leave this Summit.

Thank you.