

**Transitional Islamic State of  
Afghanistan  
Ministry of Communication**



**Statement by H.E. M. Masoom Stanekzai the Minister of  
Communication of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan  
at the World Summit for the Information Society in Geneva on  
December 11, 2003**

Honorable Chairman,  
Excellencies respected delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this special gathering, the Swiss government for hosting the conference and all those who actively participated in the preparation of this important conference.

We have passed through different stages of preparation for this conference and many of the delegates and participants were present in several regional conferences held in different parts of the globe, and shared their visions and views to make the outcome of the first phase of the conference more successful.

The Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan firmly recognizes the importance of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT's) to achieve the nation's development and reconstruction goals.

Afghanistan being a land locked, least developed, suffered longer than any other country from invasion and civil war, terror and humanitarian crisis in the ages of information technology that put us in a special and unique case in terms of digital divide.

We have to deal with a number of key priorities in our efforts for peace stability and nation building, none of them can wait and they should be addressed at the same time and in parallel: governance, reform and restructuring national institutions, creating an enabling environment for business and public and private sector partnership fighting against poverty, reconstruction of basic infrastructure, disarmament and reintegration of demobilized combatants, repatriation of millions of Afghans and addressing the livelihood issue or taking off health and education from the ground are all priorities. In all these efforts the role of ICT is very visible and much needed and essential for achieving these goals rather quickly.

Since the birth of the new Government in Afghanistan there has been progress both in public and private sector. There has been policy and regulator aspect to address the issue of enabling environment, reform and restructuring as well as infrastructure development, and capacity building. More than 8000 Afghan men and women are trained or under training in more than 120 small and medium sized private and public ICT training centers around the country.

The two wireless telephone operators in the country has increased their investment substantially to quickly expand their network to fulfill the fast growing demand of the market which is much larger than what was predicted at first.

At the same time recently a number of contracts for expansion of the digital fixed telephone, using the latest fixed wireless technology CDMA successfully concluded and the work is in progress. In the mean time a number of infrastructure projects are in the bidding process that will help us to connect our provinces as well as the districts.

Last year at this time only one out of every 625 Afghan citizens had access to telephone services, where today after one year the teledensity increased by 4.2 times and with the acceleration in investment we will achieve the goal of one telephone per 100 Afghan citizens by the end of our physical year.

Taking in to account the specific situation of our country and the new opportunities of trade and transport that has emerged from the recent initiative and agreements of the regional countries and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) support that will pass from the two corridors from north to south and south east of Afghanistan to connect central Asian countries to Arabian sea and Persian gulf through Iran and Pakistan creating a new opportunity for better regional connectivity. The feasibility study of the fiber ring along these high ways and to all our neighboring countries has been completed and this will become the *digital silk Road*, building this road will truly help our people to have access to information and communication in more economic way that they can afford, and the countries in the region will be better connected.

There are other joint initiatives planned with ITU, UPU, and UNDP for promotion of ICT but all these initiative will remain on paper unless it is not supported by the donors to help Afghans in bridging the digital gap.

Talking about the digital divide and ICT for poverty alleviation is great but it become a new business and whether we have ever assessed the amount of resources time and energy we spent on modalities, consultations, piloting and discussions as it is badly needed versus the amount actually dedicated for the practical work to help under served populations to access to ICT. We need to think of practical ways that how to help those about whom we are talking much but doing very little for them.

*Reducing/ bridging the digital gape in Isolated and least developed countries need more support particularly in the following four key areas:*

- 1. Support in development of Progressive and appropriate Policy and legal frameworks to help private and public sector partnership*
- 2. Long distance and rural ICT infrastructure development to make sure universal access for under served population is insured*
- 3. Support in building local capacities, applications, and transferee of knowledge.*
- 4. Support to make sure network security and its protection against cyber attacks and abuse by criminal is insured and at the same time the freedom and privacy of access to information is also secured.*

*To achieve these objectives substantial human and financial resources are needed and more important we need much more to invest on people.*

Telecommunications is a priority development sector, essential to facilitating the broad reconstruction effort in Afghanistan and Building people centered; inclusive Information society is the common desire and dream for many nations, including Afghans

The importance and beauty of this summit is that it brings people and nations together to think jointly for a better just and prosperous world by creating the opportunities for people all around the world to work together to be empowered with access to information, improve human right situation, fight against poverty, good governance, and break the boundaries that block the artificial barriers that separate people from each other.

We are sure that the final declaration and plan of action of the Summit will become a road map for creation of information society. We are also stressing on the practical aspects that how all can work to make it happen in the real life.

Mr. Chairman, Let me once again confirm our commitments to work together with all nations and organizations to achieve digital solidarity.

In conclusion I once again would like to thank the organizers of this conference for doing an excellent job and opportunity they provided to all of us and Wish the success for every body in achieving the objectives of the summit.

Thanks.