ARMENIA

Mr. Chairman.

Let me start by thanking the government of Switzerland for hospitality extended in hosting the World Summit on Information Society. We greatly appreciate the preparatory work of the UN Secretariat and Specialized Agencies.

Armenia has been considered the «Silicon Valley» of the Soviet Union. The first computer has been created ªnd assembled in Armenia in 1960. Today, in advancement of the private sector, we have declared our objective of seeing Armenia as a provider of intellectual services. This Summit is important to us, since we look forward to establish common rules of the game in the field we emphasize in advancement of our economy. Today the software and IT services comprise 1.7% of Armenia's GDP. That places Armenia among IT high growth countries.

We have prioritized IT as one of the prospective fields for cooperation with the EU. Our "E-Caucasus" initiative is already in process with support of European counterparts. The regional European Academy is established in Yerevan.

An IT Council under the Prime Minister comprised of various ministries, private companies, academia and NGOs has already drawn the IT sector development master plan. Currently the work is underway for developing it into a comprehensive strategy. Among the firsts we have implemented e-visa program, and continue with e-consular services. These initiatives are especially useful for a nation with many migrant workers, and a large Diaspora. Ahead of the initiatives of this Summit we have initiated Diaspora networks. The «Silicon Armenia)) portal allows for the active involvement of Diaspora in advancing ICTs in Armenia.

There is another reason we are here. In our part of world, soviet thinking continues to hamper smooth transition to an engaged society. Technologies help us change old assumptions. They force service users and providers in public and private sectors to simplify procedures. By this we get closer to a society of equals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are here not as technicians who expand and broaden the capabilities of technologies. We are here as leaders who wish to use the potential to strengthen democratic societies, transparent and accountable government. Providing good education, good health services and good governance is every state's responsibility. It is evident that e-Education, e-Health and e-Governance can serve and shall be employed as efficient tools in that domain.

Armenia's ambitious plan is to assure connectivity for all our schools in three years.

Rapid development often leaves behind parts of society. IT revolution has not been an exception. While some speed up Internet access and upgrade computers, many are left without a regular telephone line. That digital divide deepens economic and social gaps. We are here to jointly insure connectivity and computerization for all.

That responsibility is not government's alone. NGOs, academia, media, and donor organizations shall employ applications based on new technologies as a tool for development. It will help to diminish the digital divide between and within nations.

Last but not least, in regions like ours, where political relations among neighbors are less than ideal, we look for information technology to build a virtual community of nations. Professionals and students shall be able to communicate and cooperate. This will force governments to follow and truly appreciate the potential of the information society: cooperation and development across borders without physical obstacles.

I wish all of us success in this essential endeavor. Thank you.