

World Summit on the Information Society

Speech of

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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be part of this occasion as we gather here in Geneva, to lay foundations of the Information Society. This noble cause.

Information Technologies have profound changes in human society. These different from social transformations caused by earlier scientific advances. The invention of the telegraph in the early 19th century started the modern Information Technology. By the 21st century we are witness to a dramatic new wave of IT, leading to massive socio-economic changes.

Information Technology has significant advantages over past industrial technologies. Its impact goes beyond the developed world and extends to developing countries as well. It has opened up vast new opportunities for them, unlike past technology.

Information Technology demands very modest investment. It does not degrade the environment. Information Technology requires only one ingredient to become productive, namely human intellect. The technology becomes cheaper as it develops itself. Also, while their cost declines progressively, their uses multiply at a faster rate. These fundamental differences have created conditions for us to leapfrog underdevelopment.

Bangladesh has placed poverty alleviation on the top of its development agenda. It is here that ICT has a critical role to play. It is for developing countries and especially the least developed among them to seize the opportunity and adopt ICT as a priority tool to fight hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, discrimination against women, children, aged and disabled. The need to invest in ICT infrastructure and especially ICT human resources is paramount.

Excellencies,

I am happy that our national policy on ICT conforms closely with the outcomes of the documents we intend to endorse in Geneva. Our aim is to build an ICT driven nation comprising a knowledge-based society by the year 2006. We hope to establish a country-wide ICT infrastructure that will ensure access to information by all our citizens. This will both empower people and enhance democratic values. It will also facilitate sustainable economic development, governance, e-commerce, banking, public utility services and a variety of on-line ICT enabled services.

Excellencies,

The challenges faced by poorer countries to build an Information Society are formidable. The complexity of the issues is compounded by a lack of resources and ICT infrastructure. This came up in the Preparation Committee meetings leading to the two outcomes, namely the Principles and Plan of Action. I am happy that the world community has shown flexibility and remarkable will in adopting them.

Excellencies,

We live in an asymmetric world marked by wealth and poverty. The digital divide has widened the development gap. However, I believe that we have now devised a technology that can overcome these differences and lead to a global society with minimum poverty and maximum equity. We

must, indeed, resolutely commit ourselves to build the Information Society and implement our Plan of Action.

In this regard, the need for both regional and international cooperation_ is vital. This is necessary to overcome financial obstacles that impede access to ICT. There is also a need for greater support and cooperation programmes from International Financial Institutions. Impetus from this World Summit is, therefore, crucial.

I would like to strongly recommend that we create a Digital Solidarity Fund which would inter-alia:

- * Channel technical and financial assistance towards national capacity building;
- * Facilitate transfer and use of technology from developed countries;
- * Assist sharing of knowledge and skills;
- * Develop compatible regulations and standards that respect national characteristics and concerns, including spectrum management.

Excellencies,

ICT offers a unique opportunity to attain human development and socio-economic targets set by the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It provides a chance for the poorer countries to narrow the gap with the developed world. We need to demonstrate our united resolve to take up this challenge. Above all, we need to demonstrate progress before we meet again in Tunis in 2005.

I thank you.