



World Summit on the Information Society

Statement delivered by

Senator the Hon. Lynette Eastmond

Minister of Commerce, Consumer Affairs and

Business Development

BARBADOS

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Barbados is one of the smallest nations on earth but we come to this process with a big heart and an eager mind. We seek to contribute to the process in a meaningful way, for by contributing, we hope that we can help to realize the benefits that Information and Communication Technologies can bring to millions of people around the world.

It is easy to imagine that Barbados would have become overwhelmed by the cumulative revolutionary changes that have occurred within the global economic and political environment

over the past five years. Indeed, Barbados has participated in the re-negotiation and implementation of international trade arrangements at great cost to itself. Nevertheless we continue to do so, largely because we believe that non-participation would be even more costly to us. However, International trade rules are not the only rules that are currently being formulated. There are several systems of rules, sometimes called standards, that directly affect almost every economic activity in which we participate.

It is these rules or standards that will amount to our new non-tariff barriers, if formulated in a manner that does not take into account the peculiar circumstances of small states.

Barbados still believes that the possibility of participation by all states in matters that affect their economic survival or prosperity is the only credible approach that will ensure transparency, non-discrimination, equity and effective implementation.

It is therefore critical for Barbados that ICT issues are being managed through a multilateral process under the auspices of the United Nations.

Barbados will continue to be vigilant to ensure that the framework and structures that evolve, especially in the establishment of standards for ICTs, continue to recognise the right of participation by all states.

Barbados has participated in this World Summit process from its very inception. We recognised then that ICT would be a critical component of our development process and would provide the essential tools for national development and growth well into the 21st Century.

We have already started the process of telecommunications liberalization, which we envisage will lead to greater competition

in the telecommunications market and enhance access and choice for the consumer.

To ensure that this liberalization process complements the Government's policy of bridging the digital divide, a comprehensive project to computerize every primary and secondary school classroom, connecting every student to the internet and supporting the delivery of knowledge in a digital format is also underway in Barbados.

We have also embarked on the establishment of community resource centers to provide Internet access and computer training for all who cannot afford to own personal computer systems.

Today, we are more convinced than ever that ICT tools are an essential element to our social and economic development. Recognising this, import duties have been removed from ICT equipment and software to make computers more affordable to the

general public, and with effect from April 1, 2004, the sale of computer systems will no longer be subject to Value Added Tax in Barbados .

It is unfortunate that our government policy aimed at reducing the cost of ICTs to the general population is often frustrated by distributive policies of major transnational ICT companies and the restrictive legislation of developed countries that adds many layers of cost to our consumers.

In addition to the benefits expected at the national level for the integration of ICT tools, we also recognize its critical importance to our regional and multilateral trading initiatives, including the evolution of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy(CSME), the negotiations for the hemispheric Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and our participation in the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Similarly, ICT will allow meaningful participation in the global economy for all nations and can lead to a re-definition of trading patterns. We visualize new and more innovative business activities being created and a burgeoning trade in cultural products and services, which we see as forming the basis for a **Creative Economy**.

Both the challenges of integrating ICTs and the benefits which can accrue are truly global in nature. To ensure that the benefits are indeed universal, we must focus on solving our mutual problems while working to minimize any differences that may separate us. I believe that the WSIS process has thus far realised significant achievements in this direction.

In this vein, we welcome the increased transparency of the WSIS negotiations and the wider participation of the business community, NGOs, academics, labour unions, and private citizens.

As we proceed, Mr. President, we must be mindful of the increasing velocity of scientific discovery and technological innovation. We must envision a world so transformed by innovation and unintended consequences that we will build a robust, resilient and flexible social and legal structure that will allow us to rapidly adapt and adjust, while maintaining social harmony and stability.

In so doing we must always place people at the centre of our discussions. Our success will ultimately be measured by how well we prepare future generations to function in this new global dispensation.

We must promote a culture of continuous learning in all aspects of human endeavour. We must provide a strong ethical base that will provide a framework for the beneficial use of future discoveries and innovations.

In order to build a strong global information society we must address the issues of poverty and the digital divide through appropriate financing, the quality of governance, the rule of law, transparent decision-making, predictability and education.

Mr. President, we recognize and appreciate the assistance programmes offered to developing countries. However for these programmes to be truly effective, the question of ease of access and relevance of these programmes must be evaluated. Similarly there must be a commitment from the donor countries to develop enhanced and more relevant programmes to support the infrastructural development of developing countries' human and technological capacity. In this respect, the utilisation of existing developing country expertise in the consultative phases will make these programmes truly viable and sustainable.

On this issue of assistance, Barbados supports in principle the concept of a voluntary global digital solidarity fund that would

concentrate on the development of a human capacity and communications infrastructure which would provide access to the widest network of persons at the lowest possible cost.

Mr. President, many developing countries around the world recognize the vast potential that this process promises. For our own sake and the sake of future generations it is incumbent on all of us to make promise and potential a reality for as many of the world's population as possible.

I thank you.