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STATEMENT

OF H.E. MR. IGOR DAMIANOV
MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

FIRST PHASE OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE
INFORMATION SOCIETY

Geneva, 10 - 12 December 2003

Mr. President,
Heads and Members of the Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to congratulate you Mr. President on your election to this high and responsible post and to wish you a successful and fruitful work. I would also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau and to assure them of our cooperation and support. Let me express the appreciation of my delegation to our hosts, the Government and people of Switzerland for the excellent organization of work provided in the enchanting city of Geneva and extend our warmest 'thank you' for their hospitality. We would also like to commend the Swiss Government for the efforts aimed at facilitating the elaboration of the final draft documents of the Summit.

Mr. President,

it is an honor and pleasure for me to address the First Phase of the World Summit on Information Society, which is playing an important role in defining the milestones for the development of the Information Society in the 21st century. Our position on these most important issues is well reflected in the common statement of the European Union.

Mr. President,

At the beginning of the new Millennium we witness an unprecedented process of transition from industrial to information society with the three sectors of telecommunications, information technologies and media functioning in ever closer synergy. This enables the development of new products and services, but also has an enormous impact on various aspects of social life, such as education, health, media, public services and commerce. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been rapidly changing contemporary society and community life. On the other hand the majority of the world's population has no access to ICTs and the benefits of the Information Society.

The developing countries have marked a significant progress in building their information infrastructure during the 90-ies. However, there is still a substantial difference between the developed and the developing countries. While the gap in fixed and mobile communications has narrowed, the 'digital divide' in the construction of highway networks and providing electronic services to citizens and businesses grows wider both between the different countries and between the urban and the rural areas.

The objective of the current Summit, which is convened on the initiative of the ITU with the approval of the United Nations General Assembly by its res.56/183, is to overcome this tendency. It has to define the framework for building a global Information Society for all. In this respect we share the vision contained in the Draft Declaration of Principles to build a people-centered, inclusive and development oriented Information Society premised on the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mr. President,

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are among the major priorities of the Bulgarian Government. We consider providing access to information society services to all strata of the population, construction of high-speed information infrastructure and support of innovative products and services as the foundation of knowledge-based economy that fosters economic development and improves people's lives. Our program is based on the understanding that the information infrastructure links the country to the global economy and ensures its competitiveness.

The success of the Bulgarian government policy in the field of telecommunications and information technologies is demonstrated by the remarkable 35% growth of the ICT sector during the last two years, the 4% increase of Internet users during the first four months of 2002, as well as the doubling of mobile phone users to over 3, 000, 000, which would be a good basis for the introduction of mobile communications of third generation. Bulgaria ranks eighth in the world by the number of IT certificates per capita. Over 90% of the governmental institutions have web sites with interactive access. I would like to point out that this success was achieved primarily through the experience and professional skills of the IT experts in Bulgaria. Let me also add that my country plays an important international role in coordinating the Working Group on the use of electronic means for the implementation of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice on Environment (Aarhus Convention).

We are looking forward to enhancing cooperation between governments, private sector, civil society and the international and regional financial institutions, for the achievement of the goals and principles enshrined in the Draft Declaration.

We stand ready to share our experience with other countries and to take advantage of this exchange.

Thank you for your attention.