

**STATEMENT
BY**

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants,
Your Highnesses,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with particular pleasure that I welcome the initiative by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the International Telecommunication Union to organise a world summit on information society.

I am proud to point out that the development of wireless technology, the technology underpinning the information society, originated from the invention of the radio set, attributed to the great scientist Nikola Tesla, whose home country was Croatia. The vision of comprehensive global connectivity he had at the beginning of the 20th century is now taking shape and is in full swing.

Croatia recognises the importance and timeliness of this conference and, drawing on its own experience, wishes to make a contribution to the shaping of the information society.

Our experience demonstrates how essential the exchange of quality information is for development, both at the level of local communities and at the macro level of state governance.

We are aware that we live in an information society, having information as the main objective, but also as a means of development.

Therefore, those who control the information have a distinct advantage, and the battle for one's cause, i.e. the battle for hearts and minds is increasingly fought with information.

Allow me to focus your attention on the economic benefits of embracing the information society, offering great possibilities for less developed countries.

Only by investing in information resources can developing countries catch up with the developed world, which is in itself a wonderful opportunity to narrow the gap between the developing and the developed countries.

At the international level it is essential for lesser developed countries to mobilise the necessary means to become integrated into the information society. A redistribution of global resources is therefore needed to avoid the danger of limiting the actual spread of the information society only to the developed world.

However, at a time when technology is developing faster than the underlying social infrastructure - legal, political or defence, and when its penetration is unstoppable, governments must ensure that it spreads in an even and standardised fashion.

We are aware that the global information society helps to promote human rights and liberties. However, it also carries an inherent threat to the fulfillment of those rights and liberties. With computerisation individual privacy has come under more threat than ever.

That is why states and the international community must play a role not only in fostering the development of the information society but also in incorporating clear mechanisms for the protection of human rights and liberties as well as the protection of privacy and intellectual property.

Striking a balance between the protection of the right to privacy and intellectual property on the one hand and the accessibility and free flow of information on the other is essential.

Furthermore, states and the international community must devise and harmonise legal regulations providing for the protection of the individual against any abuses of information, and prevent the spread of unacceptable contents including racism and hate language.

Governments and the international community should also make sure that the public sector, unappealing in terms of profit-making, is not left behind in the development of the information society.

Croatia has become involved in recent thinking on this issue and has put forward three projects, of particular interest for smaller countries. These are:

- speech recognition and synthesis for languages of small countries
- access to the benefits of the information society to citizens with special needs and
- a blueprint for an information society development strategy for smaller countries

The core issue and, I believe, the goal we wish to reach in the shortest time possible is making the information society accessible to all, everywhere and under the same terms, turning it from a global into a universal phenomenon.

Allow me, in the end, to re-iterate the readiness of the Republic of Croatia to endorse the conclusions adopted at this summit and to actively pursue their implementation, drawing on all its resources and potentials.

Thank you