



DELEGATION OF CUBA

Statement by H.E. Mr. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of the National Assembly of People's Power of the Republic of Cuba in the World Summit on the Information Society.

Geneva, 11 December 2003

Mr. President,

These are not times for illusions nor to echo a rhetoric meaningless to the peoples of the world. To seriously speak of “the information society”, the conquest of a world free of hunger, ignorance, unhealthiness, discrimination and exclusion is a prerequisite. For this phrase to be more than a deceitful slogan it has to be placed in the context of true humanity and solidarity.

What does “the information society” mean for 75% of the population of the developing world? What is the use of new information and communication technologies for the 2.2 billion people living in extreme poverty, for the 843 million people living in hunger and for the 2,4 billion lacking in health services? What would the 854 million adults who do not know how to read or write, and the 115 million children without access to education do with a computer? How would it be used by the two billion people lacking electric energy.

Much has been achieved by humankind in the fields of science and technology since the beginning of history. The advances of the last century and their dynamics are impressive. But what is really amazing is the contrast between the material progress reserved for a few and the ever increasing backwardness in the development of humanism and solidarity.

The number of those who are not yet acquainted with the telephone is higher than the total of the world population when commercial telephone services were established. Those who barely survive today in the most abject poverty are much more numerous than those who inhabited the earth the day the United Nations was born with its unfulfilled promises of peace and freedom.

In 2001, the countries with the highest income concentrated 73% of INTERNET users and 95.5% of the computers connected to it. But, in addition, the “digital divide” creates new contrasts within countries, including the richest ones, where those marginalized also abound. By 2002, it was estimated that only 2.4% of humankind acceded to INTERNET, while between 50 and 60% struggled against poverty.

Let this summit not be one more in the long list of meetings convened for the debate of vital issues, but without concrete results. Let it result, in essence, in the firm commitment to carry-out effective actions. INTERNET should not remain in the hands of the main owners of transnational capitals; it is imperative to create a democratic intergovernmental institution which regulates it and promotes international cooperation and the transfer of financial resources and technology. Let the Declaration and Plan of Action of this Summit serve as a means for halting the media manipulation, for upholding truth, for accepting cultural diversity and for ceasing to impose the patterns prevailing in the countries of the North to those of the South.

Unilateral and arbitrary measures imposed against Cuba, as part and parcel of a universally condemned blockade, must cease. The aggression suffered by our radio-electric space, in a clear and systematic violation of the norms and

procedures of the International Telecommunications Union, must end. The truth regarding the unjust imprisonment of five young Cubans for struggling against terrorist groups that, from the U.S. and with its protection, continue to attack our country, must prevail.

A new world order of information and communications is an unpostponable need, requiring, furthermore, the achievement of an international revolution in the field of education. It is possible to eradicate illiteracy and to extend education up to sixth grade throughout the world. The total expense for this achievement would amount to less than the 0.004% of the Gross Domestic Product of industrialized countries members of OECD in a single year.

Cuba, blockaded and attacked, provides its modest contribution to a number of countries and reiterates its readiness to participate in the international effort that should be undertaken by all.

Two and a half centuries ago, Jean Jacques Rousseau denounced “a handful of powerful and rich in the summit of greatness and fortune, while the multitude crept in darkness and misery”. Not much has changed in the world since then, in a world submitted to a regime “that only serves to maintain the poor in their misery and the rich in their usurpation”.

Let us do something concrete here in Geneva in order to advance towards the dream of justice and equality inspiring hundreds of millions today, in the certainty that a better world is possible.

Thank-you