

Speech by  
Ms. Ulla Tørnæs, Minister of Education, DENMARK,  
at the World Summit on the Information Society  
December 11, 2003

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General,  
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

The Information Society - this great vision - means nothing unless it means the triumph of development over poverty, of freedom over censorship and of knowledge over ignorance. If we fail one, we will not fulfil the others.

This Summit is a unique opportunity to bring these three elements together. The time to act is now. Those who choose to lock doors today will find that there is no key to opening them tomorrow. It would be a monumental failure first and foremost for the people who would be denied the potentials of modern ICTs.

We must eradicate poverty through sustainable economic growth, social development and increased market access. Here information technologies can play a crucial role, but we will need to work closely to bring ICTs to everyone.

At the same time we must take a clear stance against poverty. Only by focusing our efforts directly on the poor can we mobilise the energy, ambition and inspiration needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in areas such as education.

Lack of education is the bitter black oil that covers the sea of ignorance. Its sinister shadow holds captive a vastness of suffering. Denmark has therefore launched five new education programmes with special focus on Africa. Here the use of ICTs in creating knowledge sharing and learning will be important in making the next generation able to benefit from the unprecedented access to information and knowledge.

Already today ICT is playing an increasing role in many developing countries. It is therefore crucial that developing countries begin to integrate national e-strategies in to their national poverty reduction strategies.

We must make the information society all-inclusive.

The fight for freedom of expression has raged with each technological leap. The genius of Gutenberg was promptly matched by the cohorts of censorship. And today the next major battlefield is forming around the Internet.

In too many countries, there is a fear of the power of free imagery and free words. Still, censorship cannot hide that limiting access to information is limiting equality and equity. That restricting freedom of expression is restricting connections and communication. And that oppressing the opinion of others is oppressing human rights and human dignity

Some ask how far we should go in ensuring freedom of expression when hundreds of millions do not have access to even basic ICTs? Taking a rights-based approach to ICT and development is one way of bringing together the standards of international human rights and ICT developments efforts.

An example could be working towards good governance through accountability by making relevant information accessible through the Internet. Another could be ensuring that national ICT policies

take into account the needs of the rural poor. These examples show the close relationship between development and individual rights.

Maybe it would be better to view access to technology as a question of the power of people. To go from ICT to focussing on Information and Communication *Networks* -the links and interactions between people that create knowledge sharing and learning.

Each nation must put the development of the information society high on its national agenda.

Comprehensive and forward-looking e-Strategies are needed both in developing and developed countries. Denmark's future depends on our ability to create and use knowledge and technology. We have introduced a comprehensive knowledge Strategy for the Danish society.

Focussing on eGovernment, eLearning, eBusiness, eHealth and eInclusion in annual ICT action plans help us reap the full benefit of ICTs and paves the way to the true knowledge society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This Summit is a unique opportunity for discussing issues of global importance. One such issue is the network and information security.

International co-ordination and co-operation should be strengthened in order to avoid massive cyber attacks and other security incidents. But still with respect for the free flow of information and the freedom of expression.

Another important issue is the Internet governance. Here it is our task to ensure that the Internet will continue to develop.

- A development that benefits our citizens and businesses.
- A development in accordance with the fundamental principles we all adhere.
- A development that helps to progress our societies.

This requires a balanced framework - a framework in which governments, the private sector and civil society all play important roles. We must therefore continue the international dialogue on Internet Governance with the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Danish stand at the ICT4D Exhibition presents both Denmark and our development partners ICT-efforts. From Copenhagen over new ICT enterprises in Africa to the collections at the Royal Library in Bhutan.

Let us today lay the foundation of the future Information Society through international co-operation and a genuine partnership between the public and the private sector as well as with civil society.

Thank you.