



Government of
the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia

Statement
by
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at the
First Phase Summit of WSIS
10 - 12 December 2003
Geneva, Switzerland

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to join other speakers in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election to the chair of this historic summit. I am confident that under your able guidance and leadership this Summit will be a success. I would also like to thank the Government and people of Switzerland for hosting this Summit and for the warm welcome extended to us. I should also like to commend the ITU and the WSIS Secretariat for the leading role they played in the preparations for the Summit.

Mr. President,

The peoples of the world, under the leadership of the United Nations, are seeking and enthusiastically cooperating to build an information society which is global in nature. This new spirit of cooperation, which was spearheaded by Resolution 73 of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in 1998, is unique in its conceptual framework and approach. It is unique in the sense that people of the world for the first time are fully converging in an assertion that ICT is a tool and an enabler of the new and emerging societal transformation. In Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is our region's major millennium initiative in which bridging the ICTs infrastructure gap has been identified as one of the key elements of promoting regional integration and development in the continent. In addition, the NEPAD initiative is complemented by the African Information Society Initiative, which aims at fostering national information and communication infrastructure in support of accelerated socio-economic development across the region.

Mr. President,

As a developing country, Ethiopia would like to exploit every means and opportunity which would assist it in fighting against poverty as well as in its effort to ensure sustainable development. We are convinced that the emergence of a global information society is inevitable and believe that the Summits in Geneva as well as in Tunis will speed up this process. We do, therefore, share and fully support the basic considerations expressed in the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action that there is a need for developing countries, particularly LDCs, to be equipped with, inter alia:

- the necessary enabling environment,
- the relevant institutional and management capacity,
- internationally competitive telecommunications infrastructure and services,
- pervasive penetration of internet technology,
- skilled human resources, and
- streamlined ICT applications into development programmes

so as to enable them to strategically intervene in speeding up the evolution of an information society. In this connection, developing a purposefully targeted financing mechanism to assist LDCs is decisive to make this global initiative a reality.

Mr. President ,

In Ethiopia our overall development strategy seeks to promote rapid, broad based and equitable growth by focusing on rural development where 85% of our population makes a living. The role of ICTs infrastructure cannot be overlooked in the process of implementing such a development strategy. Therefore, at present, Ethiopia is undertaking a programme which aims primarily at fostering greater application of ICTs

through capacity building to enhance public service delivery. The components of the programme include, among others, satellite based ICTs application in secondary education across the country, interconnection of higher education entities and implementing district level connectivity to empower a decentralized development approach. In addition, this year, we have established a national Information and Communication Technology Development Authority to guide the synergetic and systematic exploitation of the ICT industry for the accelerated attainment of our social, economic and political development objectives.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, I would like to assure you that Ethiopia is committed to work for the realization of the Summit's Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. In this regard, we look forward that an effective monitoring mechanism against measurable indicators will be adopted and that regular impact assessments will be conducted, to ensure the fulfillment of the Summit's objectives. I would also like to express Ethiopia's readiness to make the maximum use of ICTs for the benefit of enabling our society to be competitive and responsive to an extremely dynamic world economy, as well as to minimize our vulnerability to changing manmade and natural environments.

Thank you