

**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND  
TARJA HALONEN  
TO THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY  
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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND TARJA HALONEN TO THE UN WORLD SUMMIT ON  
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At the start of the new millennium, we the representatives of our nations reaffirmed our commitment to build a more peaceful, a more prosperous and a more just world. We accepted that we share a common responsibility to maintain human values, equality and the principles of justice world-wide. In this task information technology can serve as our partner, speeding up the achievement of these goals.

The new information technology is a powerful tool, but it is just a tool. At the heart of all this is the human being, not the technology. At this Summit we are all committed to build an information society that puts people first and that fosters participation and development.

The information technology revolution is profoundly changing people's lives: both at work and at leisure. It has, in its own way, influenced the birth of globalization.

We are now in the process of creating a global information society. This common goal will open up new opportunities for increasing well-being, for improving the quality of life and for promotion of sustainable development. Everyone should have access to these opportunities.

Every country bears the primary responsibility for its own development. And every country will create its information society from its own unique starting point. History and culture, just like the other requirements for development, all vary from country to country. However, the values and the principles on which we build the information society are common to all of us in the United Nations. Human rights and freedom of opinion are the basis of an information society where people have the right to access, change and distribute information without restriction.

Within the information society, the significance of the information itself is central. Every human being must have access to information and it is the job of governments to guarantee this access. Information is the very basis of democracy.

At present the majority of people in the world are not benefiting from the new technology. There is a digital divide which separates the rich and the poor countries. But there is also a division between old and young and between the educated and those without the benefit of education. It is the task of all of us to bridge this digital divide.

The message of this summit is clear. The world needs solidarity - a common sense of responsibility and commitment to removing inequality. This is an absolute precondition of the creation of a global information society. It can, and should, promote the achievement of the Millennium Development goals.

My own country, Finland, has achieved, comparatively speaking, good results in the development of the information society. Every nation builds its own success from its own starting point. We cannot offer ready-made models for others to follow. We can, however, pool our experiences, and work in collaboration with one another. On the basis of Finland's Success I would like to emphasize the following.

The development of the information society is linked to general economic and social development. The task of government is to create a favorable environment for the information society, one where initiative and creativity can flourish. The development of information society requires active role from all the players, the public sector, business, civil society and individuals.

Education is the fundamental basis for economic and social development. Education is also basis for equality. Its significance is even more evident in the information society. Everyone - girls and boys, men and women - must receive the good basic education, as well as the knowledge and the skills, that the information society demands.

The development of the information society requires research and development. Innovations are essential for maintaining and reinforcing the economic basis of our welfare society.

In the spirit of common responsibility Finland is ready to share with other countries its own experiences of the development of the information society. We are also ready to reinforce our own contribution in our development co-operation for building information societies.

Finland is actively constructing new partnerships with the private sector, with the civil society and with international organizations to promote advancement in the development of information societies. An example of this is the Millennium Technology Prize. This prize will be awarded biannually as an international acknowledgement of outstanding technological achievements aimed at promoting the sustainable development of society and the quality of life.

Building the global information society requires co-operation extending to all countries and to all the sectors of society. And at the heart and source of it all is the human being - the human being allowed to be creative, innovative and co-operative.