

FRANCE



World Summit on the Information Society
Address by Mr Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Prime Minister

FRANCE

(Geneva, December 10th 2003)

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**World Summit on the Information Society
Address by the Prime Minister of France
= Geneva, 10 December 2003 =**

President,
Secretary-General,
Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The information society holds immense promise. It is changing and opening our world.

Information and communication technologies have enabled a very great number to access what was previously only available to a select few.

We are experiencing an expansion of the world, such as during the age of the Great Discoveries.

But this is no longer a time of solitary discoverers. It is a time of committed participants in a universal enterprise.

The information society has inspired dreams around the globe. Not all of the expectations placed on it have been fulfilled. It is nevertheless evident that information and communication technologies are radically changing the day-to-day lives of our citizens, businesses and societies.

The information society is already a reality, opening up new opportunities, but - like any technological revolution - raising new concerns.

Therefore this is no longer the time to dream; this is the time to build.

This is the purpose we must give to this Summit in Geneva, which for the first time, under the aegis of the United Nations, has assembled States with a common concern to provide a framework for the emerging information society.

It represents the first step in an essential international dialogue. It must also be the first step in a common undertaking.

In every field - politics, economics, society and culture - information and communication technologies are a fantastic way of sharing our heritage, our knowledge and our skills, to meet the challenges of the new century.

If the information society is to live up to its promises, in terms of dissemination of knowledge and the economy, we must ensure that its benefits are accessible to all.

The information society must not leave anyone behind. The strength of this emerging society will depend on our capacity to share it and make it universal.

We must build an "information society for all".

It is our responsibility to define together, in Geneva and later in Tunis, the framework of this information society in the making.

Of course, we must ensure it remains the dynamic and inventive force that produced such impressive results. But we must also give meaning to these technological advances. New technologies must benefit a societal project.

The information society that France and its European partners advocate is a society open to all, founded on the principles of freedom, equality and non-discrimination.

Information and communication technologies must uphold **rights and freedoms**. ICTs must serve democracy, by guaranteeing freedom of expression and privacy, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ICTs also promote freedom of information.

These new technologies also facilitate new relationships between citizens and government and greater participation of all in civic life.

ICTs must also be used to **promote development**, to achieve the Millennium Goals and to encourage the sharing and dissemination of knowledge.

This is why we must help the least favoured communities and countries to obtain these technologies. We must not assume that the "digital divide" and the risk of marginalising a part of our populations, our continents and our planet are inevitable.

We must redouble our efforts to bridge the digital divide, within our own societies and through international cooperation.

Determined action by local governments is also vital and I am delighted, in this respect, that the Summit of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society was held recently in Lyon.

The information society must also preserve **cultural and linguistic diversity** and foster dialogue between cultures.

Respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, including the possibility for everyone to express themselves in their own language, must be one of the founding principles of the information society.

To achieve these objectives, we must agree on international rules for the information society, in which our fellow citizens can put their trust.

Between now and Tunis, we must reflect together on ways to improve Internet governance.

France would like this concept of "governance" to be understood in the broadest sense, so that, beyond legitimate technical concerns, all the problems posed by the development of the information society be identified and addressed.

We will also have to agree on ways to guarantee network security and provide fair and transparent management of domain names and allocation of addresses. Mindful of freedoms, we also need to reflect on content, to ensure that it remains respectful of the human person.

Rules for the digital economy will have to strike a balance between freedom of commerce and protection of personal data, privacy and consumer rights. Similarly, there must be international rules to safeguard intellectual property rights, which are the foundation of innovation, technological progress and creation in our societies.

We must also create this space of trust for our children. France is committed to the development of international cooperation on the protection of children and combating illicit content, particularly child pornography.

To respond to these challenges, concerted action is required - from governments, of course, but also from international organisations, civil society and the private sector, in a spirit of "co-regulation", which is already effective in France.

France considers it essential to take the positions and contribution of non-governmental actors into account, because without them we have no hope of bridging the digital divide. The information society cannot exist or develop without this network of experiences and initiatives, from which it draws its strength.

I am confident that the impetus given in Geneva today will take concrete form in Tunis. We must define here together the principles that will govern the information society.

Now we must work on their implementation and approach the preparation of the second phase of the Summit in Tunis, even more conscientious and united.

In co-operation with its partners in the European Union and the Francophonie, France is determined to make an active contribution to the success of this undertaking and to create the conditions at home for the successful deployment of a dynamic and inclusive information society.

Thank you.