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**Speech by
Rezzo Schlauch,
Parliamentary State Secretary in the
Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour,
at the World Summit on the Information Society**

**Equal Opportunities in the Global Information
Society**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I.

Germany welcomes this first World Summit on the Information Society.

The summit gives developed as well as developing countries a chance to discuss the opportunities and challenges of the information society under the umbrella of the United Nations.

We link this with our vision of a global society in which all people enter peacefully into contact with one another, and learn from one another.

Such an “open” information society can only develop if it rests on a sound basis of common values.

We regard the recognition of human rights as a vital precondition for a global information society.

This is particularly true of the right to freedom of opinion and information, the protection of human dignity and the guarantee of free, independent and diverse media.

II. Overcome the digital divide

Information and communication technology is having an increasing impact on individuals and their economic, social, cultural and political environment.

Equality of opportunity within and between states and regions is the foundation of a fair information society.

This is true of technical access to the technologies, but it extends far beyond this.

People also need to be enabled to use the new media.

So great importance must be given to human capacity building.

Here, again, ICT can make a significant contribution, via methods of e-learning.

If regions or groups in society lag behind in the digital world, this will inevitably mean that inadequate use is made of the diverse applications of ICT to improve the quality of life.

This is particularly true of the opportunities for women and girls to develop their lives.

Differences in the use of ICT exist not only between North and South, but also within countries and regions.

I take the view that the digital divide cannot be overcome without a high level of private-sector involvement.

On the other hand, governments need to create the legal and economic framework so that companies will invest.

Regions which have created fair competitive conditions, particularly by protecting foreign investment and by opening up the telecoms markets, are attractive for private investment.

For there to be a modern information society, appropriate attention needs to be paid to the interests of commerce and civil society.

I welcome the active involvement of these groups in the world summit process.

In the context of international economic co-operation, as elsewhere, ICT is not an end in itself: it serves a variety of social objectives.

These include close co-operation with the developing countries.

Germany is spending around 180 million Euro on the development and application of ICT in these countries.

III. Utilise economic dynamism

The ICT industry makes an important contribution towards the dynamism of the economies and thus towards growth and employment.

This is true not only of the market for ICT products and services, but also, and to an even greater extent, of the productivity gains induced in traditional sectors.

For this reason, the use of information and communication technologies offers enormous commercial and labour-market potential for developing and emerging economies.

New forms of the global division of labour are arising.

And in many cases, the internet in particular permits traditional barriers to market access to be overcome.

In this development, attention must be paid to ensuring that the manufacture and use of ICT is always integrated into a resource-saving and inter-generational sustainability strategy.

IV. Expand global infrastructures

Ensuring that the electronic information and communication networks, and particularly the internet, function properly, is an important precondition for the global information society.

The organisational structures required for the management of the internet need to take account of the special features of this medium and to be able to respond rapidly to changing user expectations.

The German Government believes that the ICANN approach, a transnational private self-governing body, represents an appropriate solution.

This approach should be continually expanded and made more efficient.

This is also true of issues of public interest and the role of the governments.

The growing needs of interoperability, availability, stability and non-discriminatory network access demand open technical infrastructures.

International standards and the increased use of free and open source software are cost-efficient and sustainable instruments with which to reduce access barriers and to make it easier to manage complex systems.

V. Improve access to information and knowledge

The new information and communication technologies have a virtually unlimited potential to increase the low-cost and rapid availability of knowledge, irrespective of location.

Here, sufficient protection of intellectual property rights on the basis of the proven legal instruments is vital.

This is in the interest of the researchers and developers, but also of the consumers and thus of commerce and society in general.

VI. Ensure protection and security in the information society

The major challenges on the way to the global information society include the misuse of electronic communication, e.g. the spread of illegal content or of content which is a danger to young people, or the increasing use of the internet for terrorist purposes.

This misuse demands a strong response by the international community.

However, fundamental rights like the free flow of information must not be excessively impaired.

Sufficient confidentiality, integrity, authenticity and accountability of content and services is a precondition for the acceptance of electronic transactions.

VII. Information Society Germany

On the basis of targeted national action plans, Germany has made remarkable progress on the way to the global information society.

With e-commerce turnover of more than 100 billion euros in 2003, Germany is the European leader in electronic transactions.

Many German companies are market leaders on the European ICT market.

More than 50 % of Germans are already online, and nowhere else are there more websites per inhabitant.

Employment in the ICT sector expanded by about 10 % to more than 780,000 between 1998 and 2002.

The action programme "Information Society Germany 2006", which was adopted just a few days ago, develops the successful German ICT policy further.

The priorities for the coming years are the expansion of broadband and of electronic services, particularly in public administration, health and SMEs.

Our measures and objectives offer numerous areas for international co-operation and mutual learning.

The exhibitions and presentations at our German stand at this summit provide a good overview of German activities.

As in the past, the German Government is ready to make its experience available in a bilateral and multilateral exchange.