THE HOLY SEE

ADDRESS OF HIS EXCELLENCY, ARCHBISHOP JOHN P. FOLEY,
PRESIDENT, PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS,
HEAD OF DELEGATION OF HOLY SEE
UNITED NATIONS WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY,
GENEVA, DECEMBER 11, 2003

Mr. President, distinguished representatives:

The Holy See is very pleased that this World Summit on the Information Society is being held under the high patronage of the United Nations Secretary General and is also grateful that the International Telecommunications Union has taken the lead in organizing this gathering.

As you might expect, the Holy See is most interested in the human and moral implications of the information society.

Thus, we are particularly grateful that agreement has been reached on the "Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society" (nos. 56-59) in the Declaration of Principles.

We think that most men and women of good will would approve that "all actors in the Information Society should take appropriate actions and preventive measures against abusive uses of ICTs, such as illegal and other acts motivated by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, hatred, violence, all forms of child abuse, including paedophilia and child pornography, and trafficking in, and exploitation of human beings".

In our commendable concern to make information and communications technology available to the broadest possible range of persons, I would hope that we might remember three basic moral foundations of communication: the overriding importance of truth, the dignity of the human person and the promotion of the common good.

In this context, access to information is essential to the development of a healthy society in which all citizens might be well informed and active participants, in keeping with their dignity and in light of the common good.

All of us are committed to avoiding the possibility that information and communications technologies and programmes might aggravate any inequalities which already exist.

As the Holy See has always stated, the protection of private property, including intellectual property, has the fundamental social task of serving the common good of the human family and, as such, should allow for safeguard mechanisms, even if this differs from market logic and the law of immediate economic return.

Development must be understood in a fully human way, concretely enhancing every individual's dignity and creativity.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, in an address to the United Nations Secretary General and to the Administrative Committee on Coordination of the United Nations (April 7, 2000), spoke of a "growing sense of international solidarity" that offers the United Nations system "a unique opportunity to contribute to the globalisation of solidarity by serving as a meeting place for States and civil society and a convergence of the varied interests and needs..."

My delegation is particularly interested in the role of media and ICTs in the preservation and construction of peace. We hope that this Summit will end in a high-profile commitment in favour of peace, taken by all of us. It is just one aspect of the ICTs' enormous potential for good, but perhaps the most urgent.

In these days, we cannot build a lasting peace without the cooperation of media networks. They can serve the culture of dialogue, participation, solidarity and reconciliation without which peace cannot flourish.

If peace is the state which exists when each person is treated with dignity and allowed to develop as a whole person, a courageous contribution of media, instead of featuring violence, immorality and superficiality, could foster a more open and respectful use of ICTs to build better reciprocal knowledge and respect and to foster reconciliation and a more fruitful relationship among peoples of different cultures, ideologies and religions.

Technology is a means: we are responsible for using it so that, in this communication age, the search for truth and true freedom might be advanced among all peoples.

Thank you.