

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR YAAKOV LEVY  
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF ISRAEL**

**TO THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY**

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Mr. President,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election, and for the excellent manner in which you have been conducting this historic gathering. On behalf of my delegation, I would also like to thank the Government of Switzerland for organizing this unique conference of unprecedented significance. We wish to pay special tribute to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the ITU, Mr. Utsumi, the President of the Prep-Com, Mr. A. Samassekou, as well as the Executive Secretariat for their contribution to this Summit.

After years of hard work, we should all be proud of the results. The Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action constitute a major advance in addressing the global issues of the information society. An important part was played by civil society and the private sector. This summit is an important milestone leading the way to the second phase of WSIS, which will take place in Tunis in 2005.

Although the Information Society is a difficult concept to define, it certainly has tremendous effects on all spheres of human activity. The means of human communication have changed radically within a very short time. Millions of people across the world exchange information and ideas, regardless of borders or distances. Indeed, for many of us, the Internet or the mobile phone have become an integral part of our lives.

The Information Society has also changed significantly the lives of the citizens of Israel. The age of information technology has placed Israel's economy, and particularly its hightech industries, in the forefront of world development in these fields. Two major reports published this week by the ITU and by the World Economic Forum, place Israel amongst the leading countries in terms of ICT access and networked readiness. The World Economic Forum's Global Information Technology Report 2003/2004 states that, and I quote "Israel's performance is noteworthy, posting a rank of 16 overall; its ranking is enhanced by outstanding scores in the availability of scientists and engineers, the quality of scientific research institutions and the availability of venture capital". In the ITU's first global Digital Access Index, Israel ranks among the high access economies, which have achieved a high level of access to digital technologies for a majority of their inhabitants.

However, as was noted by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan during the opening ceremony, information and communication technologies are not a panacea. Access and usage are still denied to billions around the world. This new gap, the digital divide, between rich and poor, developed and developing, privileged and less privileged is a worrisome phenomenon we must address.

Israel is no exception to this phenomenon. It has experienced the kinds of digital divides faced by many countries represented in this hall. Israel is home to a widely diverse population from many ethnic, religious, cultural and social backgrounds. Many of its citizens are new immigrants. In many cases, veteran immigrants coming to Israel at an advanced age educated in their countries of origins, would face difficulties of adjustment to a modern and sophisticated environment, while the next generation of younger people, would be in the forefront of computer technology.

Numerous national initiatives have been launched in order to achieve this objective, among them Community Internet Centers, the "Computer for every child" programme, The "Government online" programme, assistance to people with special needs, projects aimed at the integration of new immigrants, and the "Internet for Senior Citizens" initiative. These projects are coordinated in Israel with the full participation of civil society and the private sector by the National Committee for the Information Society.

For Gal, an 12-year-old boy from Tel Aviv, who is handicapped and in a wheelchair, the project of the "virtual campus" means a lot. Through this project, he, like many other kids, is able to further his education while confined to his home.

The Internet has also changed the life of Elisheva, an 85-year-old woman, and has given it a new meaning. Like many other senior citizens, she lacked the skills and knowledge required for the use of Internet. She is now part of a project in which university students are training senior citizens in community centers, enabling them to be connected to the global community.

Mr. President,

The development of an information society is a unique tool, which can be used to promote universal access to information and education. At the same time, it also creates new problems and threats.

A tool that may be used for peaceful and constructive purposes may also be used with other intentions. The use of the Internet by terrorists and pedophiles for their activities is a blatant illustration of this situation.

Phenomena like racism and prejudice, supported by ignorance, suspicion and hatred of the other, are still pervasive in the world today. The ability to spread these hateful feelings through a new, wider and encompassing mechanism, which offers a great degree of anonymity, is an irresistible temptation to the exponents of hatred and the inciters to violence.

It is therefore incumbent upon us to seek ways to unite against the contamination of the Internet by xenophobia, racism, and religious intolerance, including the resurgence of anti-Semitism, and to find the appropriate technological and legal remedies to these phenomena.

Mr. President,

Open and easy access to a variety of sources of information would enable millions in our region, Arabs and Israelis alike, to discover, evaluate and judge the significance of historical and contemporary developments so as to foster better understanding and reduce suspicion.

We look forward to the day, when all those in our region feel comfortable enough to interact with their Israeli colleagues in the academic, cultural and commercial domains. These contacts, transcending political boundaries will surely enrich us all. By learning about each other, we will erase mutual suspicion and build understanding and peace, which should be amongst the aims of the information society.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.