

JAMAICA

PLENARY STATEMENT

FOR THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

(WSIS)

1st phase – *GENEVA, SWITZERLAND*

DELIVERED BY

HONOURABLE MINISTER PHILLIP PAULWELL

HEAD OF DELEGATION

4th Plenary Meeting

DECEMBER 12, 2003

SALUTATIONS

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a special privilege for me to speak on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica, at this unprecedented World Summit on the Information Society. I extend my country's congratulations to the International Telecommunications Union, on organizing and inaugurating the World Summit.

I must also congratulate and commend the eminent persons who comprised the World Summit Secretariat under the outstanding leadership of Mr. Adama Sammasssekou. We pay tribute to you and your team on successfully guiding this three-year process towards its first destination here in Geneva.

This Summit marks a significant milestone in the on going evolution towards a global Information Society. As representatives from some 189 countries we have come together to make a commitment to building a people-centered, inclusive and development oriented Information Society. This is a challenging task that will continue to dominate our present and future agenda for development.

Today, as we meet to launch the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, our duty is to lay the corner stone and begin the basis of a solid foundation on which all our nations can build resilient and

sustainable economies of the future. It is fitting therefore to forecast that historical accounts of the United Nations will record these three days as a time when, Member States convened in Geneva to chart the future.

The official documents of the World Summit – the Declaration of Principles and attendant Plan of Action – are the result of meticulous and painstaking work – consultations between and among communities on both sides of the digital divide – information rich and information poor nations. It is important that such consultations were not limited to the governmental level, but cut across the spectrum of political, economic, social and cultural spheres of Society.

The documents before us for adoption, reflect the views of, governments and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, numerous civil society groups – cultural communities, academia, trade unions, the media, local authorities, women’s organizations, indigenous peoples, the physically challenged and – the future builders and custodians of the Information Society – the youth.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates, it is critical that the consultation machinery of the World Summit continues to be inclusive of many voices and reflective of diverse interests, if it is truly to project a common vision of sustainable development for all. And when we speak about using information technology for development, we are not just talking about stimulating a rise in national Gross Domestic Product. We are talking about embracing Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a way of life; using it to impact every area of our lives.

As cited in the declaration of principles, ICT has tremendous potential for transforming old economy industries; for giving new life to manufacturing; for vastly improving the services sector and for increasing value-added and productivity in agriculture. Increasingly, ICT applications are enhancing and supporting education, health care, the environment, public administration and poverty alleviation.

The list of facts that describe the digital divide and the underlining socio-economic divide are well known and so now is not the time to recount them, rather now is the *time for action – collective action*.

At this Summit, let us reiterate our commitment made at the Millennium Summit to bridge the digital divide that we all agree can and must be bridged. The ease and rapidity with which our general population acquires information and communication technology skills will become a major determinant of the pace of our development in the future.

While we accept that providing technology connectivity and public access are “all important” first steps, we must demonstrate that the work does not end there. Beyond technological infrastructure, the basic premises of the Information Society rest on the capacity of users to optimize the use of *content* to meet their needs.

This demands a level of education that includes not only basic literacy, but content design which is culturally appropriate, familiar and easily understood, thereby allowing the user to fully assimilate and utilize

information. In sum, the intrinsic link between technology and content must be maintained, in order to develop and empower individuals and communities in the sense of a *real* power to communicate, using their language, their cultural symbols, their imagination and enriching their lives in the Information Society.

While there is much more work to be done by all nations, the unfolding of the Information Society is a phenomenon which has irreversibly been put in motion. It is evident in all corners of the globe.

Whether it is:-

- Mali – where last year villagers in the remote area of Timbuktu witnessed the implementation of the first multipurpose community telecenters in Africa, bringing telephone and Internet services, distance learning and telemedicine to many.
- Or thousand of miles away in my country, where a farmer in rural Jamaica, after a hard days work, is able to immediately access a buyer for his products via the Internet by accessing **TRADEPOINT** – a joint government/private sector initiative. At the **TRADEPOINT** website the farmer can contact a buyer, negotiate prices and work out delivery details for his produce, all in a matter of a few hours, or less – a process which prior to **TRADEPOINT** would take days or weeks.

We are committed to e-commerce and e government. As a result we have developed an electronic transactions policy and enabling legislation. We recognize that in order to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by Electronic Commerce, we must be prepared to do a number of things.

- First, we must be prepared to provide widespread access to information networks and services, since this is the fundamental infrastructure for full participation in the digital economy.
- Second, we must be prepared to open our economies to foreign investors and suppliers. This is critical towards participating in the global marketplace.
- Third and most important, we must be prepared to educate our people to become technologically adept, because without education there can be no innovation, and no growth.

For our part, the Government of Jamaica has taken the initiative to act, by making bold steps to establish the ICT sector as the very platform of modern economic development in the nation.

The government's objective is to ensure that Jamaica becomes an active player in the global information society. We believe that an appropriate ICT policy will generate new products; new production processes and new forms of organization and competitiveness, and its ultimate success will depend on human skills, extensive adaptability and the will to use new technology.

This policy emphasizes:

- Promoting partnerships and awareness between the state, civil society and private sectors;
- Increasing opportunities for access and connectivity to ICT infrastructure;

- Increasing the competence, skills and literacy level of the marginalized majority to allow for active participation in the emerging knowledge based society; and
- Promoting public access to government information – we have passed legislation to grant citizens access to documents previously in the public domain and archives. This legislation represents one example of the government of Jamaica’s intention to create an enabling environment for transparency and good governance.

The ICT revolution and global developments in the telecommunications environment, dictated the end of the monopoly in our telecommunications industry. However, the commitment of the government to the promotion of the sector as a major engine of growth and development expedited the liberalization process.

Since the beginning of the liberalization process, we have experienced unparalleled growth in voice telephony rivaling any country in the world. Combining fixed line subscribers and mobile users there are almost **1.8M** telephone accounts. In a population of **2.6M** this achievement is phenomenal.

Today, the Government realizes that there must now be a shift in emphasis from voice telephony to the provision of data services coupled with a corresponding increase in high speed access to the Internet allowing for the delivery of broadband services.

In developed and developing countries alike, the use of information and communication technology in education has been gathering momentum. The technology has facilitated the development of virtual centres of learning and most universities now offer on-line courses.

Increasingly we must utilize information technology to promote distance teaching as an integral part of our education and training systems. This approach assumes great urgency given our resource constraints and the value of education to the process of national development.

As a small island developing state, we face our share of challenges, yet, we have risen to the task at hand, through, political will, stakeholder involvement, policy and legal reform and international and regional cooperation. While assessing our accomplishments, we are still very much aware that there is still much more to be done as a nation and as a region.

CLOSING

In closing, Mr. Chairman, allow me to restate, to you, the ITU, and to the distinguished audience gathered; Jamaica's commitment to the World Summit and our willingness and determination to work in partnership to create an information Society that will lead to greater solidarity among peoples and nations.

Thank you!

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