



**The Address of His Excellency
General Emile LAHOUD,
President of the Republic of Lebanon**

The World Summit on the Information Society

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The advent of the information society to which we devote this summit is, for our planet, a crucial moment. In order to assess its implications, it is important to put it in its proper historical perspective.

It is the third stage of a long evolution inaugurated some 10 millennia ago in the plains of the Middle East. There, the agricultural revolution, in converting hunter-gatherers into cultivators, founded our civilization. Resting on the labor of men – “you shall earn your bread by the sweat of your brow” – the rural economy it established led to the imperial and feudal order that governed most of the world known at that time until the industrial revolution. Its other corollaries were alas slavery then serfdom.

In mastering new energies, the industrial revolution of the XVIII century transformed work through machines: no longer synonymous with physical labor, it ceased being a curse and for the first time, humanity knew abundance. It consequently discovered freedom. Over the ruins of dead empires, the industrial nations learned democracy which was consolidated when the injustices inherent in the excesses of liberalism were rectified with the advent of social democracy.

Founded on a more equitable distribution of prosperity within the industrial nations, this order remained the sole prerogative of these nations. The rest of the world was unfortunately excluded. Without going as far as saying that the wealth of some is the result of the poverty of others and that the development of the so-called North is historically the outcome of the exploitation of the South, let us acknowledge that the latter was long deprived of the benefits of the industrial revolution.

The new information technology which allows the dematerialization and the delocalization of the economic activity ensures today a better future for the so far underprivileged peoples. However, a deep gap still opposes the world of the rich to the world in which more than one billion human beings live on one dollar a day, drink undrinkable water and have no access to the modern means of communication.

The digital production and communication techniques are neutral per se. They can liberate from underdevelopment regions still kept off progress. They also have the ability to exponentially increase the advance of the most powerful and aggravate the despair of the most deprived.

Left only to the laws of the market, globalization can only yield more inequalities and deepen the economic and social imbalances with each passing day. On the cultural level, it can be synonymous with standardization to the benefit of a dominant pattern and laminate other cultures whose diversity nevertheless enriches the world.

The Nation-State rectified in times past the abuses of unbridled liberalism through economic and social reformism, thus reconciling private initiative and a democratic direction of society. This synthesis was possible under the aegis of the state as it took place in a historical context where the economic and political spaces coincided.

This time is to a large extent bygone. If the laws of the market could be, within the national framework, controlled and humanized, it's because there was therein a political authority with the power to do it. In the actual world frame where information techniques have projected us, this authority is still uncertain and no power, no matter how great, would be able to unilaterally replace it.

This rejection of unilateralism is a permanent feature of my country's policy. It dictates our attachment to the United Nations Organization and I would like here to congratulate its Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the organization of this summit.

We are in this respect in full harmony with the International Francophone Organization, which I presently have the honor of presiding and I seize this opportunity to salute its Secretary General, President Abdou Diouf. I would like to recall here the resolutions of the Francophone Ministerial Conference on the Information Society, held in Rabat last September. Inspired by a pluralist conception of information and reasserting the necessity of cultural and linguistic diversity, these resolutions constitute a precious contribution to the works of our summit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Lebanese population is characterized by a high level of education and multilingualism linked to our geographical location as well as to the structure of our economy where services and exchange are predominant. Thus, it is naturally predisposed to information-related activities. A large number of our enterprises is devoted to them. Some even act in partnership with prominent international groups.

These enterprises animate large sectors – banks, insurance, trade, tourism, transportation, communication – which are traditionally characterized in Lebanon by dynamism and efficiency.

Convinced of the necessity of putting the public sector in line with the private one, the Lebanese State launched an administrative reform with computerization as its cornerstone, which is a necessary condition for good governance and modernity.

These can only be established in a context of peace, of which Lebanon and the whole region have also been deprived for decades.

The principles of this peace, recalled during the Arab Summit held in Beirut in March 2002, are clear as to the Arab-Israeli conflict: an Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories up to the line of June 4, 1967 as well as the remaining occupied territories in the south of Lebanon; Israel's acceptance of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the Palestinian territories occupied since the 4th of June 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza strip with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1397; a just and negotiated solution to the Palestinian Refugee problem in accordance with United Nations Resolution 194 and the rejection of Palestinian patriation in host countries;

I insist on the rejection of the patriation of the Palestinians in Lebanon. A blatant violation of international law, it would entail the renunciation by them of their homeland, and the liquidation of any hope for a durable peace in the Middle East. Gravely destabilizing the delicate economic and demographic balance of my country, it would contravene our constitution as amended by the Taef Accord concluded in 1989 with the endorsement of the United Nations and the great powers, notably the United States.

As to the Iraqi crisis, events emphatically prove that it won't find a solution until this country's sovereignty is restored in accordance with international law and the reestablishment of the United Nations' competence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Democracy, good governance and modernity cannot be imported and even less imposed from the outside. They can only be the outcome of the free will of people liberated from fear, war and occupation.

Thank you.