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**National statement by H.E. the Minister of
Economic Affairs of the Netherlands**

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**at the occasion of the First Phase of the
World Summit on the Information Society**

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Draft statement by the minister for Economic Affairs of the Netherlands

Mr Chairman, Secretary-General, Heads of State and Government, Honorable ministers, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank on behalf of The Netherlands the Swiss Government for hosting this unique event and the warm hospitality in the city of Geneva.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you about the issues of the Information Society. For the future prosperous development of our societies information and communication are fundamental building blocks. This World Summit raises the awareness of this fact.

Would I be standing in the future, looking back, I think I can say: it all started in Geneva.

We prepared the future of the Information Society there.

It is all about chances and opportunities. It is much more than a meeting of governments. The presence of business of civil society as a whole bears witness to this fact. We also created the future for our youth. Youth, which more than any of us, knows what are the possibilities of ICT. They are sitting here at the front row.

That is what it is all about.

ICT equals growth and productivity and development.

With ICT tools better and more accurate services are possible in health and education.

Quality of life is improved.

But there are threats as well. A failure of the internet could result in an enormous chaos in public life. We have to make sure that we have done everything to protect the proper functioning and management of the internet.

Spam has taken such proportions that international actions by all stakeholders are urgent.

The political declaration which we will adopt recognizes this but we all will have to make our actions much more concrete.

The management of internet should be appropriate. This is a very complex issue and I would urge the international community to continue to work on finding the most appropriate management structure. This is an important task for us in Tunis.

Access to communication and internet is a key condition to its use. Many initiatives are being taken to address the problem of access, especially in under-served areas. We find this in developed countries as well as in developing countries. Many good examples how to overcome the access problem are exhibited in the PALEXPO.

But still we are told that the digital divide is increasing. What is the main cause for this?

Connectivity is, I believe, only a part of the answer; skills and education are essential.

Solidarity is necessary to pave the way for knowledge sharing and assist countries to develop strategies and policies and investments based on such a strategy.

For this purpose The Netherlands has opened an ICT Trust Fund with the World Bank and concrete projects are now undertaken.

Also, we provide substantial financial and technical assistance to developing countries through NGO's like HIVOS, the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) and OneWorld International.

This World Summit on the Information Society is also about human rights. Starting point for the Netherlands is that human rights should be respected equally in the new 'digital era' as they were in the 'paper era'.

As a founding member of the European Union the Netherlands emphasizes the importance of the protection of the freedom of expression and information as a keystone of the Information Society. This is also the meaning of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and of the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In fact Human Rights constitute the cornerstone of European society. EU is much more than a common market, it is a society of values. This weekend Heads of States and Governments meet in Brussels to adopt a Constitution including a charter of Human Rights. The Council of Europe already set the example.

In the coming six months the Netherlands holds the Chair of the Council of Europe. 'Human Rights in the Information Society' will be one of the priorities of the Program of the Dutch Chairmanship. The Dutch government intends to initiate the development, within the Council of Europe, of an international regulatory framework,

based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights, for the application of fundamental rights in the Information Society. The starting point for this initiative will be the Political Message of the Committee of Ministers to the World Summit on the Information Society at this session.

Chairman,

I started with the future, I started with youth.
This is a perfect combination with ICT because they know the opportunities.

My vision is a vision of an inclusive, people-centred society in which technologies, even such powerful technologies as ICT, are not seen as development goals but as tools for human development. In the world of tomorrow information society should serve the whole of mankind.

Thank you.