

Statement
by
Hon Mr David Cunliffe
Associate Minister for Information Technology
on behalf of New Zealand
at
The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
Geneva, Switzerland, 10-12 December 2003

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the New Zealand Government. We recognise that it has been a long path to the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action but it is a journey on which New Zealand has been proud accompany the world community. Many of the key points in these documents are reflected in our own information society thinking and strategy.

New Zealand has a tradition of socially-responsible, stable and democratic government with concern for the rights of all our citizens without distinction and for the rule of law. We have a very high level of technology awareness and utilisation, a sound technology infrastructure backed by a relatively light-handed regulatory regime. We are keenly aware of the need to make better use of information and communications technologies in order to develop both our economy and our society. Over the past several decades we have enriched our society with a mix of immigrants from all parts of the world. At the same time, we are deeply conscious of our bicultural heritage. We are located in the South Pacific and need to work with our neighboring Pacific Small Island Developing States for the benefit of our region.

Historically, New Zealand has quickly adopted new technologies. According to OECD research we have the highest per capita expenditure on ICT in terms of percentage of GDP in the world. We have consistently been one of the leading users of the Internet for well over a decade. However, we have recognised that we are not making the best possible use of what these technologies offer. We are therefore developing strategies to ensure that ICTs contribute fully to informing our society, to the education of our children, to the training and skill levels of our working population, to the strengthening of scientific research and development, and economic productivity.

The New Zealand Government has taken a number of initiatives to deepen and broaden the reach of broadband throughout our country, especially in our more remote and rural areas. We intend that all schools and their surrounding communities will be able to access broadband by the end of 2004. We are encouraging development and use of new broadband applications and are aiming to realise the benefits to our tertiary education and research communities of very high speed next-generation Internet technologies.

Social cohesion is essential for a growing and innovative economy and society. We recognise that efforts to create a more innovative nation could isolate pockets of our society unless we ensure that all our citizens can learn about and access new technology. Through our Connecting Communities programme we are promoting the sustainable development of our communities to ensure that all can participate in the knowledge economy. A key principle of this strategy is our commitment to work in partnership with local government, the philanthropic, voluntary and private sectors, and directly with communities, including indigenous communities.

We are currently reviewing our government's overarching digital strategy with the objective of building on recent progress to further extend the benefits of ICT to communities and to enhance productivity gains arising from the use of ICT in other sectors of our economy. To this end, my delegation greatly values the opportunity at this conference to meet with, and learn from, the experiences of other delegations.

Among the strategies we are developing are those to preserve our past and future cultural heritage through digital archiving, and to provide universal electronic access to this heritage by collaboration among libraries, archives and museums. The aim is to provide access to digital information for New Zealanders, especially online digital New Zealand content, to collect digital resources, and to ensure long-term storage and preservation of New Zealand's online heritage.

In conclusion, as a Pacific country, New Zealand welcomes this Summit's recognition of the vulnerability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), their need to be included in the Information Society and the value to them of ICTs as a development tool. We look forward to working with the international community toward achieving the goals of the Plan of Action.

Thank you for your attention.