Protocol

I have great pleasure in addressing this Opening Session of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. May I use this opportunity to thank the President of the Swiss Confederation, His Excellency Mr. Pascal Couchepin, the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, for the excellent preparations made for this Summit.

Our Government supports the goals and the shared vision of the Information Society as articulated by Resolution 56/183 of the United Nations General Assembly which seeks to put at the disposal of our common humanity, the benefits of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The internationally-agreed development goals as contained in the Millennium Declaration as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot be realised until an all-inclusive Information Society is created.

I want to seize this opportunity to remind us that the major goal of the Information Society is to seek to achieve the bridging of the digital divide between the developed and developing countries and among the urban and rural areas with a view to transforming the digital divide into digital opportunities so that no individual or community is left behind in the ICT revolution. In the present situation, almost everyone in the developed countries has access to ICTs, whereas in sub-Saharan Africa, overall fixed line teledensity is about 1 to 130 inhabitants while Internet, Computers, and Television are available to only a handful of elites and urban dwellers.

The challenges to development are numerous to countries of the South. We are still struggling to provide the basic necessities of life which we lack like food, shelter, safe drinking water and health care services. Furthermore, social infrastructures like schools, roads, hospitals, electricity, etc, are either in a state of disrepair or. . non-existent. Our countries are, however, endowed with natural and. human resources which we can develop with international support and cooperation to move us forward in our socioeconomic progress. While faced with these challenges, we are also confronted with the digital revolution. We are, therefore, placed in a dicey situation i.e. how to share the meager resources between the basic necessities of life and provision of ICT infrastructure. This situation underscores the need for concerted efforts at national, regional and international levels to address the imbalance and the challenges of development.

In spite of the difficulties, Nigeria has made some efforts to address the problems. We have adopted a national ICT Policy which aims at creating the necessary enabling environment with emphasis on public-private partnership for ICT development. To this end, appropriate machinery has already been put in place to ensure that our country is part of the evolving Information Society. Given the tremendous progress that has been made in this respect, it is gratifying to note that quite a substantial number of Nigerians have become computer literate thereby increasing the number of Internet users. Nigeria is making efforts to integrate ICTs into various sectors of development including Agriculture, Health, Arts, Culture and Tourism, Education, Trade and Industry, Law Enforcement, Urban and Rural Development, Banking as well as Administration. This is preparatory to our e-governance programme.

In addition, Nigeria has enacted a National Telecommunications Act to give direction to the industry and create investor-confidence in the economy. An independent regulatory body has been established with powers to operate without interference. This has led to the introduction of a variety of new services,

increased foreign and domestic investment as well as the intensification of competition. Within the past four years, fixed telephone lines have increased from about 300,000 lines to about 720,000 while mobile telephones increased from less than 50,000 to about 2,500,000. Direct foreign and domestic investment in the sector amounts to about four billion dollars. This record of achievement over a short period is unprecedented in Africa.

Our government will continue to put in place initiatives aimed at creating the necessary enabling environment to give comfort to and reassure investors not only of the rich market of over 140 million people in Nigeria but of the safety of their investment and integrity of the key institutions in moderating their intervention.

Part of the related achievements which my Government has recorded is the recent launching into the orbit of Nigeria's first Satellite called NIGERIA SAT-I. That singular effort will undoubtedly assist the country in breaking new grounds in data gathering for use in areas such as disaster and environmental management, agriculture and urban planning. My government has also given approval for the design, building and launching of a communication satellite. This shall serve as a strategic backbone infrastructure for ICT development in the country.

Africa, having suffered centuries of slave trade, colonialism and now inflicted with numerous conflicts, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Malaria, is placed in the most disadvantaged position in the digital revolution. The continent's huge indebtedness complicates and mediates efforts at economic development, the consolidation of democratic enterprises, and the construction of inclusive platforms for democratic growth and development. This situation is further worsened by the unjust world economic order. The provision of ICT infrastructure is fundamental to development. Unfortunately, :many people in Africa, particularly school children, unlike their counterparts in the developed world, do not have access to such basic tools as computers, video games, telephone, and the

internet. The youths as future workforce and leaders, therefore, must not be left behind. However, if policies and relationships do not change for the better, they risk being excluded from the emerging Information Society, unless Universal Access is created and the governance and management of global Information Networks, particularly the Internet becomes a global public facility.

The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), a new initiative of African leaders for the economic transformation of the continent, has accorded ICT the necessary priority as a vehicle for accelerated development. To complement this initiative, the assistance and cooperation of our development' partners is urgently needed especially in the areas of capacity building, infrastructure development, technology transfer and funding.

Nigeria wholeheartedly welcomes the global effort "to build a people-centered, inclusive Information Society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge; enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential and improve their quality of life in a sustainable manner." It is precisely for this reason that Nigeria has participated fully in all the preparatory processes leading to this first phase of the World Summit on Information Society.

The existing digital divide, which has further widened the gap in the economic and technological development between the North and South calls for renewed commitment to the declaration of principles and full implementation of the action plan on how to bridge this digital divide.

I wish to remind our development partners that it is in our mutual interest for them to support Africa's effort to be part of the emerging Information Society so that it can contribute more to human development, including the global fight against terrorism. The precarious global security situation which calls for concerted

efforts by all countries has made the creation of an all-inclusive Information Society an urgent imperative.

It is against this background that I call on the developed and industrialised countries of the North to support the initiative on the Digital Solidarity Fund as a practical measure for redressing the digital imbalance.

I also appeal for consideration of a policy of debt for the African continent.

I further appeal to world leaders and other stakeholders to create Universal Access and make the governance as well as the management of the global information networks, particularly the Internet, a global public facility.

Finally, we must strive to achieve a win-win situation so that when we assemble in Tunis for the second phase of the Summit in 2005, there will be success stories to share. The world has the resources, what is lacking is the political will. I therefore implore world leaders and other stakeholders to put the human race on the path of sustainable development through the implementation of the Action Plan. The disadvantaged countries on their part must create the necessary enabling environment, especially in the areas of transparency and good governance.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to thank you for listening and for your kind attention.