

REMARKS BY H.E. PAUL KAGAME
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA
AT THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE
INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS)

Geneva, 10 December 2003

**President of the WSIS,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Today we all recognise
that ICT is not a matter of choice;
it is a necessity.

It has become abundantly clear
to us in Africa
that ICT is an indispensable tool
in the achievement
of our development outcomes,
as well as the Millennium Development
Goals (MDGs).

We have to leapfrog
if we are to be part
of the global information family,
and in the understanding
that human society advances
according to the level
of its accumulated knowledge base.

We do not have the luxury
of waiting until
the necessary conditions
are in place.

For ICT is an enabler,
and we are determined
to take advantage
of the many benefits
that accrue from its applications,
and the new opportunities
it creates for nations and communities.

The issue for us
is not whether it is worthwhile
for us to make use of ICT,
but rather whether ICT
can be used appropriately to meet
the needs of our people
and achieve our development objectives.

Our choice should not be
between antiretroviral drugs

and ICT for development;
or between penicillin and Pentium.

The challenge for us,
in the developing world,
is how best to apply ICT
to provide more leverage
in our fight against poverty,
disease, illiteracy,
lack of information
and skilled workforce.

We in Rwanda
have had a fair share
of these problems,
some of them inherited
from the 1994 genocide.

But we believe
that we have in place
an ambitious ICT programme
that will effectively deal
with these problems.

ICT has been integrated into our development strategy, as a catalyst for economic growth and social transformation.

We now use ICT as an instrument to enhance unity and reconciliation, to strengthen the participatory justice system we call Gacaca, and as an instrument of empowering women.

We use it also as a basis for the consolidation of our decentralisation programme and democratic governance.

Rwanda is a founding member of the Development Gateway project, intended to use ICT for development.

We plan to provide broadband connectivity to all secondary schools within three years, using optic fibre and wireless technology.

These will also serve as tele-centres for the benefit of the rural communities in the catchment areas, with the ultimate aim of providing universal access.

Given that we are a landlocked country, modern information and communications technology holds great potential for us.

We therefore plan to transform Rwanda into a technological hub within the Great Lakes Region,

providing low cost
and accessible means
to communicate
within the region and beyond.

Of course, elaborating
policies and plans is one thing;
mobilising resources
to implement them is another.

That is why
we would like to appeal
to our development partners
to join us in ensuring that
we realise these objectives.

At this juncture
I would like to express
our gratitude to
a number of international initiatives
which have contributed
to the growth and development
of ICT for global development,
most notably,

the Economic Community
for Africa (ECA), in Rwanda's case.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude my remarks
by reiterating our conviction
that ICT is a development tool
that will narrow the gap
between rich and poor;
and that ICT in Africa
and the rest of the developing world
will be a major contributor
to the improvement of human welfare.

In Rwanda we are convinced
that ICT will enable us
to transform our current challenges
and adversity into opportunities
for this and future generations.

I thank you all.