

STATEMENT
BY
H. R. H. Prince Saud AL-FAISAL
Minister for Foreign Affairs
and Head of the Delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

at the World Summit on the Information Society
10 - 12 December 2003

Geneva
10 December 2003

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Your Excellency the President of the Swiss Confederation, Chairman of the Summit,

Your Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which is sponsoring the Summit,

Your Excellency President Zine el-Abidine ben Ali, President of the Republic of the country hosting the Second Phase of the Summit,

Your Majesties, Highnesses and Excellencies and Heads of Delegations,

Your Excellency the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to convey to your distinguished gathering the sincere greetings of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, together with his best wishes for the success. I would also like to say that the Kingdom's delegation is delighted to be participating in this conference and is most grateful not only to the sister State of Tunisia for its initiative in proposing the idea but also to the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations and its specialized agencies for their efforts in planning this Summit and to the Swiss Confederation for hosting it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world is currently witnessing an information revolution that greatly transcends in many ways the industrial revolution that took place in the middle of the eighteenth century. All the participants in this Summit would certainly agree that this rapid evolution in the information society has greatly helped to influence the course of socio-economic changes throughout the world.

While the main aim of the international community is to ensure economic prosperity, well-being and progress for its peoples, telecommunications and information technology constitutes one of the linchpins for the advancement and development of States and the enhancement of their economic, social and cultural potential.

For its part, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, realizing the importance of the telecommunications and information sector, has adopted a pertinent integrated national plan and approved the educational, legislative and technical frameworks needed for that purpose. The Kingdom has established appropriate implementing and supervisory mechanisms and has formulated the strategies needed to promote broader awareness of the sector's benefits and to train and provide the human resources required for the utilization and development of its technological applications in various fields, such as electronic commerce and electronic government, etc. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has also transferred the operation of its telecommunications system from a governmental agency to an efficient commercial company. As a result of all these measures, during the last five years the telecommunications network has been modernized and developed into a fully digitalized network covering even the remotest rural areas and providing numerous modern services.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The digital gap between the developed and the developing countries is continuing to expand. We believe that this gap can be closed only through joint endeavours to achieve balanced growth of the telecommunications and information sector in all countries of the world in such a way as to guarantee its full scope.

Accordingly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believes that efforts must be made to establish an integrated infrastructure for the telecommunications and information sector to ensure the advancement of societies and boost their rates of development, since the development of this sector is an essential prerequisite to narrow the above-mentioned digital gap so that all will have an equal opportunity to share in the benefits of information technology. To this end, we must agree on basic ways to ensure full and universal access to telecommunications and

information technology and to propagate this technology in the developing and least developed countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We deem it quite necessary that the two documents containing the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action should be harmonized in a manner consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and the obligations of States resulting from their accession to the relevant international instruments. There should be no incompatibility between those two documents and the domestic legislation of any State. Cultural identity and educational and linguistic diversity, as well as traditions and religions, must be respected if these two documents are to contribute to the promotion of contact and dialogue among civilizations.

The information society, like human society itself, contains both good and bad and, therefore, requires regulation without arbitrariness and management without hegemony since a free flow of information precludes any imposition, restriction or modification of its type. However, freedom must have norms and limits, without which society would become anarchic. In view of this inherent dichotomy in human society, there is a need to establish clearly defined mechanisms to regulate this new society in order to minimize or eliminate its negative aspects, such as its use for immoral, terrorist or criminal purposes. We should also show joint concern for questions of information security in order to enable every State to protect its information networks and systems from potential illicit access, tampering or sabotage. Hence, it is important that the task of managing the Internet be assigned to a regulatory body subject to rules of international law in order to ensure that it is utilized and run in an equitable and transparent manner.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wishes to confirm its sincere desire and willingness to cooperate in any manner conducive to the achievement of the desired results of this Conference, which will require ongoing monitoring and diligent endeavours to ensure their implementation in coordination with the International Telecommunication Union.

In conclusion, I would like to thank H.E. Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and H.E. the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, as well as the Swiss Confederation, for their commendable efforts to prepare and organize the first phase of this Summit. I also wish the sister State of Tunisia every success in its organization and hosting of the second phase of the Summit which will be held, God willing, in the year 2005.

Thank you all.