UNECA

Your Excellency, President of the World Summit on the Information Society
Excellencies Head of States and Governments
Ladies and Gentlemen

Africa's economic performance, since the mid-1990s, has raised hopes of a possible turnaround, compared to the stagnation of the previous two decades. The new trend is largely credited to policy reforms and better governance, which are taking a hold in many countries, where improved confidence has translated into positive economic growth. Nevertheless this progress is still fragile and may not be sustained if the gap between the information rich and the information poor nations widens. The impact from new information and communication technologies is no longer confined to the communications and information sectors. It has become a pervasive mass technology affecting virtually all sectors of society. However at present, some people are more distant, unacceptably so, than others, from the opportunities of ICTs, - notably many women, many young people, the disabled and many rural and marginal urban community dwellers. Our approaches and our achievements must be inclusive: our point of departure should be the fundamental right to communicate and to participate in society. This requires equity of access to and use of ICTs.

The threat posed by the digital divide is more of an economic development problem than a technological one. That is why in Africa we look into the matter not in terms of access to technological resources and services only but in examining its wider implications in socio-economic development.
There is no doubt that the opportunities of the information and knowledge economy facilitated by ICTs is one that both big and small, developed and
less developed countries cannot afford to miss out on. African countries should take advantage of them to facilitate their socio-economic development process.

Ladies and Gentlemen

To create digital opportunities, ECA is working with member States to develop appropriate National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) policies and plans in the framework of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI). This has enabled most of the African countries to include ICT development in their vision, their national development goals and objectives. However, in addition to challenges posed by developing policies and plans, programme implementation may be the greatest challenge facing ICT deployment in African countries because Africa needs massive investments to be part of the knowledge society. We believe the adoption of NEPAD and the implementation of its ICT component would support African countries in their quest for digital opportunities and provide appropriate mechanisms for further cooperation with the international community.

We call upon the international community to support Africa's effort to be part of the knowledge society by providing adequate financing on a win-win basis. The policy environment is ready; the market is open in terms of development of infrastructure and deployment of services.
Join us to build the African Information Society.

Thank you.