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Address delivered by

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, amigas y amigos:

Providing connectivity for the next five billion people, has never been so important and so relevant as it is today. I would like to focus on this from two viewpoints: what it can do in terms of development opportunities for many, and at the same time what it means as a possible engine of global economic growth. I'm talking about extracting value out of globalization to ensure that people can truly participate in the opportunities of this century, which can be done by giving the disenfranchised population of this world a technology based "connectivity passport" for travelling out of poverty and into wellbeing! And I would like to tackle this concept both from the supply and the demand side.

From a supply perspective, I'm sure that in the exhibits here at Palexpo we will find many alternatives of how this

could be done with different products and services. However I would offer this thought. Most of the products cater to consumer's in the developed world. The logic of course is flawless: they are the ones that have the money to pay. And they also have a constant appetite for broadband, wireless, the last version of software, the more powerful microprocessor, and the latest designed PC. All of this is great, and many of us absolutely enjoy it! We all have heard of the saying "the difference between man and boys, is the price of their toys, and he who has most toys when he dies, wins".

But what is our "connectivity" equivalent of what Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, or Banco Sol in Bolivia, are to financial services? They and many others like them that are tremendously successful. They re-invented micro-credit and are making handsome results from the millions of thousands of very small loans that traditional banks would never touch.

What is our "connectivity" equivalent to the two day portion of shampoo that costs a fraction of the cost of the family two week bottle, and which enabled global manufacturers such as Unilever to crack open the huge markets of India's rural poor? With these approaches, other sectors

of the global economy are not only creating new markets and capitalising on new business opportunities, but they are also enabling people to unleash their sense of entrepreneurship and contributing to their own well being!

Now let me tackle this issue - "Connectivity for the next Five Billion", from the demand side.

I come from a developing nation. As President of Costa Rica I put in place strong programs to deploy ICT for health, education, smart card applications, environmental programs, government services, and even foreign direct investment. It paid off handsomely in terms of job creation and economic growth. Today as the Special Representative for ICT Issues of Secretary General Kofi Annan, I also chair the UN ICT Task Force. From both experiences I know that the challenges in deploying ICT are not entirely economic - I submit that even the poorest of nations can redirect towards investment in ICT some resources being deployed with far less strategic importance. Nor are the challenges technical - and I would submit that by visiting the exhibit stands we can confirm this. The barriers to universal ICT deployment are cultural, meaning by that a lack of understanding on the part of decision-makers with respect to how ICT can turbo charge the cause of development.

There is a need to work collectively in order to broaden understanding with respect to what ICT can do. As an example of this, today our Task Force has launched the "Global e-schools and Communities Initiative" to strengthen education and community development on the basis of technology use.

And there is also a need for leadership, political will and commitment to act at all levels. Allow me to share some examples:

1. At the grass-root level we need to build up human capacity with respect to ICT, and we should do so by fully incorporating civil society organisations such as "World-Links", the "Open WSIS", and their extensive networks.

2. At the national level we need to strengthen multi-stakeholder coalitions for ICT deployment, as it is too important an issue to be left in the hands of a single sector alone. Such approaches would help ensure a continuation of ICT policies independent of the gyrations of the national political process. Business and academia, should be particularly involved.

3.   Rich countries should mainstream ICT deployment in their overseas assistance funds. The same should be done by development agencies, and regional organisations such as the EU that are generous with the developing world. Those of you that come from the developed world, should all go back from this Summit, and talk to your government about doing so!

4.   International organisations should help build capacity within national regulatory bodies of the developing world, in order to create the right framework and environment to attract national and foreign investment in connectivity.

And for both the supply and the demand side, we should all be more systematic in measuring our results. That is why the World Economic Forum has taken it upon themselves to launch the Global Information Technology Report (GITR) on the occasion of this Summit. Published on a yearly basis, this report ranks countries on how they are deploying ICT, and what this means in terms of their competitiveness.

Amigas y amigos, ladies and gentlemen,

At the end of the day, the critical challenge we all face is whether by our actions and leadership we are going to advance in the direction of a global society that is more

inclusive, more expressive of solidarity, more sustainable, and therefore also safer? Or if by our actions (or even worse lack of action) we will move in the direction of a society that is more fractioned, meaner, more wasteful and unsustainable, and therefore more dangerous!

All of us here today and millions around the world would want to move in the first direction I have described. That will be possible if we act now on deploying ICT for development purposes, in a concerted effort that will at the same time allow us to conquer the Goals of the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations. This is our collective responsibility, and the mission of the UN ICT Task Force.

Thank you for your attention.