

Statement by Mr. Thomas E. Leavey, Director General, International Bureau, Universal Postal Union

World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva, Switzerland
Plenary, 11 December 2003 (between 7:20 p.m. and 8:40 p.m.)

The Universal Postal Union is the United Nations specialized agency for postal services. On behalf of its 190 members, I would like to confirm the commitment of postal services worldwide in helping to bridge today's digital divide.

Posts are in a unique position to help make this Summit's Action Plan a reality in key areas: in providing access to information and knowledge; in building confidence in new technologies and ensuring their security; and in developing the infrastructure needed for the information society.

Perhaps our members' greatest contribution is in their ability to give millions of people access to information through a global network of more than 660,000 postal outlets – often located in remote areas where no other communication service is established.

The UPU is committed to universal service. In developing countries especially, this means bringing to people traditional communication services that empower them and break the chains of poverty and isolation. Basic postal services yes, but also new financial, e-business and e-government services that open the doors to resources, to the marketplace, to independence.

In Bhutan and other countries, many people hold a free, unique e-post address to send e-mails that leap over distant mountains to be printed at the destination post office for local delivery. A simple example, but with millions of people still without computers, it illustrates perfectly the relevance of the postal service in the information age.

The Summit's Declaration of Principles and Action Plan have identified confidence, trust and security as main pillars of the information society. People have traditionally put their trust in the postal service to securely deliver their mail, and Posts will continue to honour this trust by developing innovative services such as the virtual post office and the electronic postmark. Indeed, the UPU and some progressive postal services are working to make the electronic postmark a universally accepted authentication device used to facilitate electronic trade and other e-business, which also ties in with the Action Plan objective.

Finally, with e-commerce, businesses and consumers need a delivery infrastructure that is efficient, dependable and fast. The UPU and its members maintain an extensive network of facilities, and monitor the timely processing and delivery of shipments using effective track-and-trace systems and other affordable technological solutions.

Posts are eager to contribute to the information society and its challenges, which will be an important element of the World Postal Strategy UPU members will adopt at their Bucharest Congress in September 2004. In the midst of a virtual revolution, I am convinced that postal services worldwide can use their unique capabilities to ensure that millions of people participate in the information society and reap its many benefits.

