



**Statement on Behalf of the World Bank Group  
to the  
World Summit on the Information Society**

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Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

During the past decades, the international community has focused its efforts on strategies to help the people of the world's poorest countries escape the trap of poverty. The World Summit on the Information Society (*WSIS*) in Geneva, preceded by the United Nations conferences of the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, is a further step of humanity to seek accords on how to overcome the imbalances in today's world.

In our world of 6 billion people, one billion own 80 percent of global GDP, while another billion struggle to survive on less than a dollar a day. Over the next 25 years, about one and a half billion people will be added to the world's population. 97 percent of these will be born in developing countries. By the year 2015, there will be 3 billion people under the age of 25. Many will experience poverty, unemployment, and disillusion with what they will see as an inequitable global system. There is a risk that such gross imbalances are - and will continue to be - further amplified by digital and knowledge divides.

This is why we are gathering this week in Geneva, to think creatively about how we can use information and communication technologies to enhance equality and to enable us to narrow the world imbalance, and to reach the common goals of development and humanity. Restoring balance to our world will not happen unless there are serious efforts to build greater public understanding about the importance of overcoming poverty and inequity.

We are linked -- rich and poor alike -- in so many ways: not only by trade and finance, but also by migration, environment, disease, conflict and yes-terrorism. We are linked by a shared desire to leave a better world to our children, and by the realization that if we fail in one part of the planet, the rest becomes vulnerable. That is the true meaning of solidarity.

In the context of the information society, digital solidarity requires global coordination as well as political commitment. Speaking for the World Bank Group, together -- working with governments, civil society, and the private sector -- we have supported about 100 developing countries in the areas of ICT and knowledge.

The World Bank lends about 20 billion a year. The significant majority of projects we finance, regardless of sector, involve ICT components. The International Finance Corporation's ICT investments average \$300 million a year, attracting approximately \$8 in additional private financing for each dollar of IFC funding. The multi-donor *infoDev* grant facility has funded over 400 pilot ICT projects since 1995. And through the World Bank Institute we offer 500-600 learning programs annually, reaching out to 48,000 people in 150 countries.

We stand ready to contribute to digital solidarity by mobilizing additional financing for regional infrastructure initiatives, as well as targeted and competitively awarded subsidies to increase ICT access to poor areas beyond what the market can provide on its own, especially in Africa. We also intend to aim to take a hard look at how we can improve the

efficiency and effectiveness of existing financing mechanisms, and how we can scale-up and expand successful ICT and knowledge programs.

Today, I am delighted to announce that the World Bank is partnering with the Swiss Government and UNDP to launch a Geneva-based information center. Through the use of our Global Distance Learning Network, it aims to provide a venue for all institutions in Geneva to share their specialized knowledge with the member countries of the World Bank Group and the United Nations systems. We would like to thank the Swiss Authorities for having agreed to initiate and sponsor such a meaningful project.

Ultimately, however, the heads of state and government, ministers and regulators in charge of telecommunications and ICT, who have gathered in Geneva for WSIS, hold the key to reducing the digital divide that separates their countries from more prosperous ones and that separates urban and rural, rich and poor, different gender and races within their own countries. Experience over the past ten years has clearly demonstrated that national policies fostering effective competition for inclusive access are the most powerful instrument to reduce the divide. The World Bank stands committed to supporting such efforts to deepen and broaden sector reform and development.

Mr. Chairperson,

If indeed we are to reach the development goals agreed upon at the *Millennium Summit*, to address the questions of success on the *Monterrey* agenda, and to achieve the type of development espoused by the *Johannesburg* Plan of Implementation, then it is necessary for each of us to 'lift our game' -- developed countries, developing countries, and international institutions alike. We must look within ourselves for ways in which to increase our effectiveness, build a more coordinated effort, and harness the promise of ICT in this process. We will come together in 2 years' time to Tunis to take stock of how far we have been able to come in building a successful global information society.