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Costa Rica

Second meeting of the PREPARATORY committee of the world summit on the information society

Geneva, Switzerland, 17-28 February 2003

Basis for this proposal

Costa Rica is endeavouring to become a part of the information society in all areas involving the transformation of the national culture into an electronic culture, making the intelligent use of ICTs possible for all citizens.

In this connection, applications and content that facilitate the use of ICTs to achieve the development of all communities in the country, in accordance with the ethical and moral principles of our culture, are crucial to the fight against poverty, and that is why Costa Rica has the region's leading software development industry for applications and content.

Costa Rica participates in regional and subregional initiatives such as the Connectivity Agenda of the Americas and the Quito Action Plan (promoted by CITEL), and the Puebla-Panama Plan which provides for the establishment in the Central American subregion of the Central American information superhighway (*Autopista Mesoamericana de la Información* - AMI), part of the connectivity project of the Americas region. This project is being implemented with the utmost respect for the institutions and local laws of each of the countries concerned.

Costa Rica was represented at the Tegucigalpa consultative meeting (29-31 October 2002), on the challenges and opportunities of the information society, at which the countries of Central America, Mexico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic produced a document entitled the "Tegucigalpa Consensus".

On the basis of its efforts at national level, its participation in regional initiatives and the Tegucigalpa Consensus, Costa Rica requests that consideration be given to the following proposals:

Geneva Declaration

Costa Rica proposes the following elements for inclusion in the Geneva Declaration:

The information society must promote the principles of:

- Respect for the cultural, economic, linguistic and ethnic diversity of all peoples.
- Respect for individual freedoms and human rights.
- Full access to education, communication, science and culture.

- Free circulation of ideas for all citizens, unrestricted respect for freedom of expression and the right to information.
- Citizens' participation in public affairs, transparency in public management and good democratic governance.

The information society, based on the principle of universal access, must put an end to the digital divide, which is caused by and reinforces the social and economic disparities of present-day society.

The information society must, as a matter of principle, seek to use ICTs as instruments of human development, to combat poverty, consolidate democracy, secure recognition of multiculturalism, promote a culture of peace, strengthen and protect freedom of expression, integration and sustainable development.

Plan of action

Costa Rica considers that the Geneva Action Plan should include activities facilitating implementation of the principles included in the Geneva Declaration, and that the role played by governments, as well as the private sector, international organizations and civil society, is a key element of those activities.

It also considers that the World Summit on the Information Society calls for the entire international community to pool efforts and resources to enable all citizens of the world to have the same development opportunities in this new society.

Global plans to guarantee universal access have not, up to now, been fulfilled, and at least half of the world's population today has no access to basic telecommunications; hence the urgent need for a change of direction by the United Nations and the developed world in order to ensure that universal access to basic communications becomes a reality in the very near future and that it is accompanied by the necessary connectivity in order to provide access to the ICTs for the entire world population.

Lastly, Costa Rica believes that, if the developing countries succeed in overcoming the digital divide, all the countries of the world, both developed and developing, will benefit and, as a result, the global economy will be much more dynamic. Consequently, Costa Rica hopes that the developed countries will take an active part in this effort to assist the so-called "developing countries".

Costa Rica considers that the goal of implementing the principles enunciated in the Geneva Declaration can only be achieved by means of concrete projects at country level, backed by all necessary international cooperation, since the projects must provide for the methods and means (including finance) for their implementation.

We are firmly convinced that, apart from access to ICTs and education of the general public, the development of applications and content is crucially important. Costa Rica is creating applications software which takes account of multiculturalism and specific characteristics, and is developing local and regional content, illustrating another of the aspects required for integration in the information society.

It is therefore requested that account be taken of the following proposals for inclusion in the Geneva Action Plan:

1 Under the coordination of the United Nations, establishment of concrete technical cooperation projects to enable governments, which bear direct responsibility for the cultural, economic and social development of their respective countries, to establish or revise and complete government policies, strategies and action plans for the successful integration of the countries

concerned in the information society. Such projects will need to receive United Nations technical assistance supplemented by the necessary technical and financial assistance from all sectors, both public and private, dealing with all aspects of strategic development planning in each country.

Indicator: Prior to the second stage of the Tunis Summit, a number of projects covering at least 70% of the developing countries and at least 90% of the least developed countries should be established and implemented or in process of implementation.

2 Based on the fact that the two fundamental causes of the digital divide are the lack of education to enable the general public to make intelligent use of ICTs and the lack of infrastructure to guarantee universal access and connectivity, it is proposed that, as in the previous case, and under United Nations coordination, concrete technical cooperation projects should be established in the field of:

2.1 Primary and secondary education at national level, to prepare children and young people to participate effectively in the information society, creating a digital culture in the developing countries. Such projects should include teacher training and provision of equipment and connectivity in schools and colleges, so that the entire population of the country can receive instruction.

Indicator: Prior to the second stage of the Tunis Summit, a number of projects covering at least 80% of the developing countries should be established and implemented, or in process of implementation.

2.2 Training of the adult population to make intelligent use of ICTs for the benefit of economic, social and cultural development at both the personal and the community level.

Indicator: Prior to the second stage of the Tunis Summit, a number of projects covering at least 60% of the developing countries should be established and implemented, or in process of implementation.

2.3 Development of connectivity infrastructure, guaranteeing universal access and connectivity for all citizens. Such projects should take account of both the regulatory frameworks and the manner in which the info-communication infrastructure of each country is developed (with participation by the State, the private sector, or both, etc.).

Indicator: Prior to the second stage of the Tunis Summit, projects designed to guarantee universal access in at least 80% of the developing countries should be established and implemented, or in process of implementation.

2.4 Development of applications and content that take account of the regional or subregional characteristics of cultural, economic, linguistic and ethnic diversity, a key factor in the fight against poverty, and a factor of human development for all peoples.

Indicator: Prior to the second stage of the Tunis Summit, a number of projects covering at least 40% of the developing countries should be established and implemented, or in process of implementation, since such projects will benefit not only the countries in which they are implemented, but also neighbouring countries with similar characteristics and cultures.