ICC: The Global Information Infrastructure Commission contribution

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May 22, 2003

Executive Secretariat
World Summit on the Information Society
International Telecommunications Union
Place des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 20
SWITZERLAND

Subject: WSIS draft Declaration of Principles and Action Plan

Dear Colleagues,

What follows, further to your solicitation of inputs from private sector entities and others, are preliminary comments of the Global Information Infrastructure Commission ("GIIC")[1] with regard to the proposed Declaration of Principles and Action Plan of the World Summit on the Information Society.

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[1] The GIIC is a Washington, D.C., based confederation of chief executive officers and comparably senior-level principals of firms that develop and deploy, operate, rely upon, and finance information and communications technology infrastructure facilities. Together as GIIC

I.   <u>The spirit and substance of the proposed WSIS Declaration of Principles and Action Plan must comport with applicable International Telecommunications Union and United Nations resolutions</u>. As a threshold matter, the GIIC recognizes and respects that the primary and formal work product of the first phase of the Summit should be a declaration of principles and an action plan. This is consistent with and in furtherance of what was envisioned in Resolution 73 of the International Telecommunications Union[2] and Resolution 56/183 of the United Nations,[3] both of which gave birth to this summit. Accordingly, the GIIC commends the drafters of the proposed Declaration and Action Plan for having faithfully adhered to the outcomes envisioned by those who conceived the Summit.

Further, the GIIC respectfully suggests that Summit leaders and delegates should recognize these resolutions as the bedrock authorities or standards for assessing the appropriateness, relevance, needed prioritization, and legitimacy of proposed declarations and action prescriptions. The GIIC notes with interest in this regard that the foundation of the 1998 International Telecommunication Union resolution to ask the United Nations to consider holding this Summit was a finding of what was then characterized as the "increasingly decisive and driving role" of <u>telecommunications</u> in economic, social, and cultural development. The "information society" was characterized in the 1998 resolution as an emerging concept, one in which <u>telecommunications</u> plays a

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commissioners, these executives are dedicated to speeding the spread of information infrastructure throughout the world. The GIIC was established during a 1995 meeting in Brussels at which the political heads of the world's leading national economies formally and for the first time acknowledged the transforming forces of computer and telecommunications technologies and the emergence of an "information society." In doing so, the heads of state challenged business leaders to unite in the advancement of public policies and information technology applications likely to spur needed investment in communications infrastructure facilities. Thus was born the GIIC. Commissioners of the GIIC come from firms based in developed nations, as well as in developing and emerging market nations.

[2] Resolution 73 of the International Telecommunication Union, adopted at the ITU Plenipotentiary meeting in Minneapolis in 1998, proposed and envisioned a Summit that would: "[establish] an overall framework identifying…a joint and harmonized understanding of the information society; [draw] up a strategic plan of action for concerted development of the information society by defining an agenda covering the objectives to be achieved and the resources to be mobilized; and [identify] the roles of the various partners to ensure smooth coordination of the establishment in practice of the information society in all Member States."

[3] Resolution 56/183 of the United Nations, adopted in January of 2002, characterizes the then-envisioned World Summit on the Information Society as a summit that would "[develop] a common vision and understanding of the information society and [adopt] a declaration and plan of action for implementation by Governments, international institutions and all sectors of civil society."

"central role." Consistent with the spirit of the 1998 resolution, the GIIC believes the Summit should refrain from—or diminish its emphasis on—addressing dynamics at the leading edge of the "information society" evolutionary continuum and focus on telecommunications-related ones (e.g., assurance of access to public communications networks) that continue to stand as the primary obstacles to entry by the vast majority of the world's citizens into an "information society," however elaborately or simply that term may be defined.

II.   <u>The Declaration of Principles must articulate and emphasize beliefs, deemphasize explanation, rationalization, and delineation of issues</u>. As currently drafted, the proposed declarations strike the GIIC as being somewhat lost in a blizzard of all-things-for-all-people-for-all-reasons explanatory statements, rationalizations, and background. Organizers and planners of the first phase of the Summit must be mindful of and responsive to natural constraints on the time and depth of knowledge of those who ultimately will be deliberating, deciding upon, and subscribing to a WSIS Declaration of Principles in December. How compelling, memorable, and effective the WSIS declarations will be, the GIIC feels, will depend on the extent to which they are relatively short in number, clear, concise, and specific only to a degree appropriate for heads of state to subscribe.

III.   <u>The Action Plan must articulate specific actions</u>. The GIIC believes this document must state with unwavering clarity what specific actions are going to be carried out, by whom, how, where, and to what specific and measurable extent and effect. Insofar as the "why" of the specifically enumerated prescriptions go, such reasons should be self evident from the complementary Declaration of Principles.

IV.   <u>The term, "Information Society," must be carefully characterized</u>. At the heart of the Summit is "information society," an inherently slippery term. On the one hand, it is a term that apparently does not lend itself to precise or universally accepted definition. On the other, and most importantly, the term strikes the GIIC as having become a banner under which a multitude of interests have found a forum within which to advocate an untidy, disparate, and arguably uncontrollable variety of economic, social, cultural, and political positions. The GIIC is of the belief, therefore, that the drafters of the Declaration and Action Plan must use extraordinary care in characterizing and delimiting—if not specifically defining—"information society."

The GIIC believes the "information society" is, as stated in the draft

Declaration, a concept, but that it is not (as stated in the draft) an evolving one. It is a concept that has been given new meaning and prominence by the relatively recent explosive evolution from primitive, basic, traditional, and arguably static forms of interpersonal and mass communications to forms of such communications that are highly sophisticated, dynamic, rapidly advancing, and diverse. These new forms of communications, in turn, are expanding opportunities for individuals to acquire, transmit, and process information, to thereby enhance understanding, knowledge, and judgment, and to thereby foster economic and social development at a rate heretofore unprecedented.

While there are many challenges that need to be addressed at all points on the "information society" evolutionary continuum, the GIIC believes it is critically important for Summit organizers and delegates to recognize that the challenges confronted by most people in the world—perhaps 80 percent[4]—are with achieving reliable access to basic public fixed wireline and mobile communications networks.

The GIIC believes it is critically important that the Declaration and Action Plan tie capabilities based on information and communications technologies to international development. The GIIC is of a mind that this is what the Summit is supposed to be all about, i.e., the role of ICT-based capabilities in development.

Further, the GIIC is of a mind that the "information society" concept is mischaracterized or dangerously loosely characterized throughout the proposed Declaration and Action Plan documents. This is evident in the proposed threshold declaration (Declaration, paragraph 1):

> We the representatives of the peoples of the world…declare
> our common desire and commitment to build a new kind of
> society, the Information Society…in which new technologies,
> in particular information and communications technologies
> (ICTs), become an essential tool [sic], accessible to all, for the
> attainment of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world
> based upon our common humanity in all its diversity.

There is nothing "new" about the "information society." Prosperity and social well being have for time immemorial flowed to those with superior means of

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[4] See, e.g., "Understanding the Digital Divide," Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001.

accessing, transmitting, and assimilating information. What are new are advances in recent decades in such technical disciplines as microelectronics, digital electronics, software development, telecommunications switching, and optical and wireless transmission (i.e., what are commonly referred to as information and communications technologies) and which have given rise to greater possibilities than ever before of widespread capabilities to send, receive, and process information. That said, it is not these technologies, per se, that have become essential tools for peace, prosperity, and justice. Rather, it is the capabilities—the services and information appliances—that have evolved and are based on these technologies. Accordingly, the GIIC believes that the following would be a more accurate reflection of the overarching and threshold sentiment subscribed to by delegates to the first phase of the summit in December 2003:

> We the representatives of the peoples of the world…declare
> our common desire and commitment to facilitate, foster, and
> accelerate the world's evolution toward an advanced
> Information Society, one…in which tools for communications
> and information dissemination become more ubiquitously
> available than they have been heretofore, so as to facilitate a
> more peaceful, prosperous, and just world.

V.   The Declaration and Action Plan must reflect the pivotal role of private investment. While the proposed Declaration is not totally silent on the subject, the GIIC feels it assigns insufficient weight and prioritization to (1) the essentiality of private investment to the development, deployment, maintenance, and modernization the world's communications and information networks and facilities, and (2) public policies that are inviting of such investment. Not until the fortieth of fifty-three sections of the proposed Declaration, for instance, is the importance of these factors briefly—and somewhat awkwardly—acknowledged. A more egregious example of this neglect, GIIC feels, is in paragraph 10 of the Declaration, which strives to delineate the "essential requirements" of an "information society." The listing of such requirements contains no mention whatsoever of (a) bedrock communications infrastructure facilities, (b) the skilled human, technological, and capital resources required to develop, deploy, run, and upgrade such facilities, (c) public policies inviting of investment in and of such resources, and (d) national strategies to guide the promulgation, adoption, and enforcement of such policies.

The GIIC is convinced of the great promise of the Summit. It believes that, if successful, the Summit will set the stage for unprecedented levels of demand throughout the world for products and services based on information and communications technologies and thereby enhance overall business interests, unleash new forms of wealth creation, foster national economic growth, and, in turn, facilitate social growth, reduce poverty, and empower individual citizens. Accordingly, it appreciates this opportunity to offer its comments and stands ready to contribute further in preparation for the Summit.

Respectfully submitted,

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