Declaration Regarding the First Phase of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society

Geneva, Switzerland

December 12, 2003

The Global Information Infrastructure Commission,[1] whose principals have participated individually in the proceedings of the World Summit on the Information Society[2], as well as via involvement in the WSIS Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors,[3] commends the national delegates to the first phase of the Summit in Geneva for their collective dedication[4] to fostering economic growth – and, thereby, enhanced social conditions – in the world's least developed countries by expediting the deployment of and investment in capabilities based on information and communications technologies ("ICTs").

Never before in the annals of international summitry have heads of state and senior officials of as many countries as convened during the first phase of the Summit formally recognized the inextricable links between the levels and quality of access to modern day communications and computing capabilities that individual citizens possess and the extent to which such citizens are

[1] The Global Information Infrastructure Commission ("GIIC") is a confederation of chief executive officers of firms that develop and deploy, operate, rely upon, and finance information and communications technology infrastructure facilities. Together as GIIC 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 promotion 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. Principals of the GIIC have participated in, submitted written comments, and provided oral interventions at all of the Preparatory Committee and regional meetings leading to the conduct of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

[2] The World Summit on the Information Society ("WSIS" or "Summit") is an international, intergovernmental meeting that is being conducted under the high patronage of the United Nations Secretary-General. The Summit consists of two phases. The first session is in Geneva 10-12 December 2003, and the second in Tunis, 16-18 November 2005. Prior to and between Summit sessions a number of preparatory, regional, thematic, and intersession meetings are being conducted by the WSIS executive secretariat. The genesis of the Summit was a resolution adopted at the 1998 Plenipotentiary Meeting of the International Telecommunication Union. Subsequent resolutions of the U.N. General Assembly endorsed the proposal for a Summit and assigned responsibility for its planning and conduct to the ITU.

[3] The Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors ("CCBI") was established by the International Chamber of Commerce at the request of the executive secretariat of the WSIS prior to the convening of the first WSIS Preparatory Committee meeting in July of 2002. Among the organizations represented by the CCBI are: the Business Council of the United Nations, Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD, Global Business Dialogue on Electronic Commerce, Global Information Infrastructure Commission, Money Matters Institute, United States Council on International Business, World Economic Forum; and World Information Technology and Services Alliance.

[4] See Declaration of Principles (http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=1013|1014) and Plan of Action (http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_single.asp?lang=en&id=1012).

empowered to wrest themselves free of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, civil strife, discrimination, and hopelessness.

Access to information and communications technology tools, thanks to the formal actions of the first phase of the Summit, shall, for the foreseeable future, be more widely regarded than before as an integral part of international development paradigms. No longer will such access be seen as part of "either-or" international development equations, juxtaposed in a subordinate or less-important way against initiatives to foster such ends as clean water, health, and education. Access to ICT tools will now be seen as part and parcel of all international development propositions.

Enhancing awareness and convictions about the vital roles that ICT capabilities can play in fostering economic growth and social well being is, while essential, but an interim step toward speeding the diffusion of such capabilities, particularly toward and for the benefit of individuals in emerging market, least developed, and otherwise "unconnected" nations.

The dream of an "information society" has, indeed, been formally envisioned and articulated by virtue of the formal actions and outcomes of the first phase of the Summit. Movement toward and realization of an "information society," regrettably, requires more than the embrace of a vision by world leaders. It requires a focusing and prioritization by individual governments on a proper sequence of actions.

The GIIC is of the belief that government leaders, especially those in localities, nations, and regions suffering from relatively low levels of access to ICT capabilities, should adopt, implement, and, as necessary, adapt public policies that will, sequentially – in order of importance – bring about the following enabling factors.

1. Infrastructure. The sine qua non of membership in the "information society" of the early 21st century is reliable access and connectivity to public communications networks. Regrettably, most of the inhabitants of the world do not enjoy such access. They can neither place voice telephone calls, send and receive facsimile messages, nor "surf" the Internet with the same degrees of ease and affordability that others, elsewhere in the world, take for granted as part of normal, everyday life. Consequentially, those people, communities, and societies without reliable access to public communications infrastructure have inferior access to information and, from an economic standpoint, suffer major comparative disadvantages.

2. Investment. Deployment of the tangled mass of wires, optical fiber cable, radio antennas, switching machines, routers, transmission links, and other gear that go into the making of reliable public communications networks, coupled with the ongoing modernization thereof, is an awesomely expensive process in terms of the financial, human, and technological resources required. Few national governments, if any, possess the wherewithal to underwrite such investments. Indeed, so great – arguably inestimable – are these required investments that official development assistance, "foreign aid," or private philanthropy is unlikely ever in the near-term future to contribute in meaningful

ways to underwriting the expense of building and modernizing public communications networks. Accordingly, private investment and private investors must be recognized as playing paramount, critically vital roles in facilitating the deployment of reliable public communications infrastructure facilities.

3. Transparency. A threshold measure of the viability of any investment climate entails an examination of the extent to which it is governed fairly and in an open-for-all-to-see way by laws and the enforcement and adjudication thereof. In the absence of transparent, fair, and predictable governance and dispute-settlement mechanisms, there can be little or no expectation of meaningful private investment in information and communications technology infrastructure facilities.

4. Competition. National leaders should make no mistake; there is no one-size-fits-all approach that will assure effective diffusion everywhere of services, products, tools, and other capabilities based on information and communications technologies. Enough empirical evidence has been accumulated since the emergence of digital electronics over the past half century, however, to compellingly demonstrate that, ultimately, those societies in which markets for ICT capabilities are governed primarily by the forces of free market competition enjoy higher, more effective, and more affordable levels of access to such capabilities than they do in societies less prone to reliance on market forces. While competition in the provisioning of ICT capabilities is an end toward which different jurisdictions of the world must, of necessity, take different routes, it, competition, is an end toward which all should aim.

5. Entrepreneurship. Essential to the development and growth of competition in the provisioning of ICT capabilities is the nurturing of environments and public attitudes that are accepting and supportive of entrepreneurship. Such environments and attitudes can be fostered by the elimination of unneeded administrative burdens, the commendation and highlighting of risk taking, and recognition of innovators for the risks they assume – regardless of the successes such individuals encounter. In the end, it is entrepreneurship that, as much as any other factor, spurs competitive delivery of ICT capabilities, and thereby maximizes consumer choices and enhances affordability.

6. Education. An imaginary, albeit desirable, national environment in which communications infrastructure facilities and information appliances are ubiquitously and affordably available for all will, of course, be for naught in the absence of a citizenry that, as a threshold matter, is literate, possesses sufficient skills with which to use and benefit from ICT capabilities, and can perform the advanced engineering tasks necessary to generate local information content and produce applications of ICTs geared specifically to meet local needs. Essential to reaping the benefits of ICT capabilities, therefore, is the universal access of citizens to education.

7. Streamlined Regulation. Experiences in markets throughout the world have convinced the GIIC that investments in ICT capabilities flow toward those nations in which: (a) government oversight rules have been minimized; (b) regulatory bodies have been

established that operate independently from incumbent national communications enterprises; (c) governments have begun to relinquish their ownership of the means by which communications services and conduits are provided; (d) other providers of communications services and facilities have been allowed – indeed, encouraged – to compete with incumbent national enterprises; and (e) investment restrictions have been lifted. Importantly, the different conditions and commercial environments in different places of the world have sensitized business to the need for national governments to carefully pace and sequence their transitions to competitive ICT markets.

8. Technology Neutrality. Technological neutrality must be a hallmark of national public policies to ensure that users of ICT capabilities can make choices that best meet individual needs. Governments are ill-positioned to prescribe what technology solutions are best for every user. Accordingly, public policies should strive to maximize the extent to which market forces – coupled with open and competitive public procurement rules – are allowed to drive decisions underlying the acquisition of ICT capabilities. Absent an adherence to technology neutral policies, governments run the risk of giving some vendors of ICT capabilities unfair advantages and, worse, saddling citizens with solutions that are inferior, needlessly costly, and that, as a consequence, retard investment, capital spending, technological advancement, and competitive advantage.

9. Trade Liberalization. Cross-border flows of trade, investment, technology, and people are critical to enabling nations to integrate themselves into – and share the benefits of – the global economy. National trade-liberalizing policies and proclivities drive the diffusion of the fruits of scientific research, technical innovation, individual entrepreneurship, and private risk taking.

10. Consumer Confidence. On the leading edge of the "information society" evolutionary continuum is the Internet, the ever-widening use of which promises to revolutionize not only the ways in which the people of the world receive, send, and digest information, but, as well, how they, their communities and nations, and the organizations of which they are a part transact business and conduct other of their daily activities. Essential to such continued – and effective – reliance on the Internet is assurance that its users enjoy high levels of protection against such wrongs as illegal and inappropriate invasions of their privacy, theft, and other breaches of security. Absent such protections, consumer confidence will wane, and fulfillment of the potential of the Internet and Internet-based transactions will be slowed. To protect against such an eventuality, governments must recognize the inherently borderless nature of the Internet, avoid the sometimes irresistible temptation to impose sweeping proscriptions and prescriptions on Internet transactions, notwithstanding the inherent difficulty (if not downright impossibility) of effectively implementing and enforcing such mandates, and, instead, work with the private sector and other elements of civil society to develop technological and self-governance mechanisms that stand the greatest likelihood of preventing abuses and sustaining consumer confidence.

As stated at the outset, the Global Information Infrastructure Commission applauds the leaders of the world's nations for their formal recognition of the critical role to be played in international development endeavors by capabilities based on information and communications technologies. It stands ready, furthermore, to work with national WSIS delegates as they prepare for the final phase of the Summit in Tunis in 2005 to devise and implement national plans of actions so as to move toward a fulfillment of all that has been envisioned in Geneva.

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