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**Chairman of the ITU Council Working Group on
World Summit on Information Society**

ON PREPARING THE ITU CONTRIBUTION TO WSIS

(Address at the first Plenary meeting of PrepCom-3)

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Mr. President,

Distinguished Mr. Secretary General!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Less than three months remain before the opening of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) initiated by the 1998 Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) which is the oldest intergovernmental organization of the UN system. ITU was established by governments of 20 leading countries of the world in 1865 as the International Telegraph Union to combine efforts aimed at standardization of telegraph equipment, drawing up common rules for connectivity and coordination of tariffs, which made it possible to create, on the basis of telegraphy, the world's first global public system of dissemination and exchange of information. Today we can state that it was then that the first step toward mass-scale use of ICTs, to modern information society was made.

In the course of almost a century and a half the Union had its name changed several times, as well as its structure and representation. All these changes were aimed at satisfying demands of contemporary society in the best possible manner and adequately responding to new challenges.

Today not only representatives of 189 states work within ITU as partners, but also 655 private companies – operators and manufacturers of information and communication equipment – all world's leading companies, as well, as 67 scientific and non-governmental organizations. This has enabled ITU to accumulate a totally unique experience of handling the most complicated tasks, combining efforts of

researchers and industry in order to make ideas emerging in various countries of the world into instruments, devices, means of communication and multimedia which function across the globe and even in outer space. As a result of this work, the achievements of ICTs, which quite recently could only be an object of dream or fantasy, today are successfully implemented in various parts of the world.

In ITU the states, as a rule by consensus, allocate limited invaluable world resources directly related to the information society, such as radio frequency spectrum and orbital satellite positions to ensure side-by-side operation of radio and television, mobile communication, navigation and security systems, and many other systems.

However, much remains to be done, including making these networks and devices safe and rendering information we entrust to them inaccessible for those it was not meant for, and not used to serve illegal or, still worse, terrorist objectives. We work hard to promote development and universal accessibility of new opportunities afforded by ICTs to people, business and society, such as telemedicine, distance learning, e-commerce, and e-government. A few years ago members of the our international community came to realize that in order to make it a reality for all, the next step is to be taken and joint efforts are to be applied to create a modern information and communication infrastructure to bridge the so-called digital divide between developed and developing countries, between urban and scarcely populated areas, between those who has already mastered modern ICT technologies and those who is only approaching this stage.

The 2002 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference and the ITU Council, responding to the invitation by the UN General Assembly concerning preparation to the Summit, set an objective to draw up a substantive contribution by the Union to the Declaration of Principles and the Action Plan of the Summit. The 150 states which took part in the 2002 Plenipotentiary Conference of the Union acknowledged unanimously that ITU was actively contributing to the development of telecommunications for economic, social and cultural development of humanity, in cooperation with other international and regional organizations. They also noted the nexus between the issues of telecommunication development and those of economic, social and cultural development. The Conference identified as crucial three objectives:

−   of establishing an up-to-date infocommunication infrastructure and providing access to ICTs for all;

−   using ICTs as a tool for economic and social development and meeting the main goals of the Millennium Declaration;

−   guaranteeing confidence and security in the use of ICTs.

As Chairman of the ITU Council Working Group responsible for the preparation of WSIS, which has already held four meetings, I would like to draw your attention to contributions made by ITU to the Preparatory Committee meetings, including the one prepared at the last week meeting of the Group in Portugal "Building the Information Society with ITU". These documents are available at the Web-sites of WSIS and ITU. They describe specific steps taken by ITU towards building the information society, primarily for establishing network infrastructure and providing universal and community access, *inter alia* on the basis of post offices, schools etc., handling the problems of information security and developing various multimedia applications. ITU contributions to the Preparatory Committee contain a number of important projects, information and ideas, including specific projects ITU is implementing according to the Istanbul Action Plan. I believe in due time we could discuss them.

Our proposals are forward-looking, while based on reality and involving actual projects aimed at narrowing the digital divide with the participation of governments and the private sector, which we trust will become part and parcel of the Summit Action Plan.

Since the challenges we face are complex and multifaceted, WSIS itself is structured in an unorthodox way – it consists of two phases and involves both governmental and non-governmental organizations, business sector, representatives of the civil society, youth organizations and other entities. We should fully utilize the benefits the Summit offers:

−   give everyone the chance to have their voices heard,

−   take the first actual steps,

−   assess the results and take decisions, perhaps during the second phase of the Summit, which would reflect real global interests.

Let us strive not to let the Summit turn into a forum for the development of individual countries or regions, individual groups or individual trends in technology or social sphere.

The Summit can and must be a Forum for the Development of Humanity. It is up to us to achieve this in these two weeks.

But, as they say in the East, talking of honey will not make you taste it. I believe that to start with we should take decisions and adopt an action plan which would allow people the world over, in urban or rural areas, to make use – confidently, securely and skillfully – of the state-of-the art achievements in science and industry, the latest ICT results and ideas.

To conclude I would like to express my belief that would be feasible for ITU, constantly evolving to deal with new challenges, having a well-developed highly professional staff, a well-tuned mechanism and experience of handling major tasks, to go on playing its leading managerial role in implementing the most important decisions of the Summit Geneva phase and in preparing the second WSIS phase in Tunis, in cooperation with UNESCO, other UN international organizations, World Bank, business sector, and such outstanding fora as the UN ICT Task Force.

We trust that ITU inputs and proposals, as well as suggestions of other organizations and countries, the private sector and civil society, would help to prepare the decisions of the Summit.

Hoping we would work together fruitfully, thank you very much.