Canadian suggestions for political chapeau for second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society

We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, have gathered in Tunis from 16-18 November 2005 for this second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society to continue the work begun almost two years ago in Geneva. One Summit, in two phases, provides a unique occasion for the global community to address the challenges and opportunities of the Information Society in a comprehensive and inclusive manner, and to ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), are available to all.

We reiterate our support for the Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action adopted in Geneva, and our resolve to implement the commitments we made therein.

We reaffirm our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This Summit is an important stepping stone in the world's efforts to alleviate poverty and to attain the internationally agreed development goals of the Millennium Declaration, within the framework of the Monterrey Consensus.

In Geneva, we recognized the importance of the technological revolution for the everyday lives of the peoples of the world. ICTs, from more basic radio and telephone service all the way through to advanced internet technology, are central to facilitating access to information and knowledge, and to connecting people and communities with one another.

We recognize that these technologies are not an end in themselves, but powerful tools to enhance and facilitate learning, knowledge-sharing, communication and cooperation in support of development throughout the world. We reaffirm that the Information Society is not about technology, it is about connecting people and enhancing their participation in the economy and society. It touches every aspect of our shared global agenda and our lives. It is about supporting education through enhanced information and exchanges. It is about facilitating access to health care in remote areas. It is about promoting cultural and linguistic diversity to foster dialogue among cultures and civilizations. It is about the ability of all to access and contribute information, ideas, and knowledge. We believe the Information Society should strengthen good governance and the rule of law through transparency and enhanced citizen participation while supporting community development, small businesses and overall economic development to reduce poverty.

In order to take full advantage of the opportunities and benefits of ICTs, they must be made available and accessible even to those living far from major centres or with limited resources. Although these technologies have expanded considerably over the past decade, we recognize that additional attention is required to ensure that efforts in this area are directed toward our commitment to sustainable economic growth and social development. The two phases of WSIS have been an important step in this process.

We believe that an enabling legal and policy framework and effective national strategies are essential for all our countries and peoples to be able to benefit from the opportunities created by participation in the Information Society. We welcome the steps that many countries have already taken to achieve these goals. Our efforts will be enhanced by international cooperation at all levels to improve coherence between national and international efforts for a global and coordinated approach to sharing the benefits of the Information Society. For the digital divide to be reduced and the benefits of ICTs to be realized in developing countries, there is a need to create, with the effective support of the international community, an enabling environment conducive to the adoption and financing of ICTs.

We are committed to bridging the digital divide, and recognize that the values of inclusiveness, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, freedom of opinion, expression and information, cultural and linguistic diversity, good governance and the rule of law are fundamental to the information society, for without them, many risk being left behind or excluded. We recognize that, to ensure that the benefits of the Information Society are more evenly distributed between and within societies, we must be particularly attentive to the needs of women, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, minorities, and other marginalized and vulnerable groups.

We recognize that our goals can only be accomplished through the involvement and cooperation of all of the Information Society's stakeholders, including governments, civil society, the private sector, and international institutions. The two phases of this Summit have been enriched and benefited from the high level of involvement of the private sector and civil society. Indeed, this process has strengthened our partnership with civil society, without whose support and commitment we would not be able to harness the potential of the Information Society for development and improving the lives of all our peoples.

We have accomplished much since we first met in Geneva, yet there is still much work to be done. The birth of the Information Society provides increasing opportunities for all our peoples and our global society which were unimaginable only a few years ago. We resolve to continue to implement our commitments, to work together to harness these opportunities, to build an Information Society which benefits all our peoples.