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President: Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century; the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy (*continued*) (A/55/75-E/2000/55; E/2000/33, E/2000/50, E/2000/52, E/2000/70, E/2000/71, E/2000/72, E/2000/73 and E/2000/74; E/2000/CRP.2)

Policy dialogue and discussion on important developments in the world economy and international economic cooperation with heads of multilateral financial and trade institutions of the United Nations system (continued)

1. **Mr. Novitsky** (Belarus) said that access to information and communication technologies (ICT) was becoming crucial to economic growth and social development. The role of the international economic community in promoting access to ICT in economically less developed countries was therefore critical. He welcomed the initiatives of international organizations, including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO), to help countries use ICT to develop and strengthen the multilateral trading system. At the same time, those issues should be considered from the standpoint of economic policy in general. As the participants in the tenth session of UNCTAD had recognized, all countries and international institutions must seek to maximize the benefits of globalization while minimizing its risks by revamping the international financial system, establishing a fair international trading system, strengthening regional cooperation and promoting economic liberalization in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Such a system should require every country and international institution to respect the principles of international law and national economic interests and should enable countries with different economic structures to operate under equitable conditions.

2. The potential of the Bretton Woods institutions, UNCTAD and WTO to tackle the problems hampering the integration of all countries into the globalizing economy had not yet been fully harnessed. Since many developing countries and countries with economies in transition, including Belarus, had redirected their economies towards market principles and had given

industrialized countries easier access to their markets, the latter should reduce trade barriers and protectionism. Reforms in the international trading system should be based on a new development policy under which international trade organizations took the specific economic and historical conditions of each State into account. The decision-making process in WTO should accommodate the interests of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in a more balanced manner. Decisions in WTO should be taken by vote rather than by consensus.

3. The pace of liberalization and globalization in each country should reflect its level of development and its political, social and cultural diversity. The principle of gradual liberalization should be recognized in all future trade negotiations and development programmes supported by the international economic community. The Bretton Woods institutions and WTO had an essential role to play in promoting regional trade and economic cooperation, particularly in Eurasia. Global economic development would require action to address not only technological problems, but also political and systemic issues.

4. **Mr. Banigo** (Observer for Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the central question in relation to ICT was how it could be used to promote development in the face of the huge digital divide between developed and developing countries. However, there appeared to be no consensus as yet among the United Nations specialized agencies and the international financial and trade institutions on the provision of funding or basic infrastructure for ICT. He wondered how much World Bank funding was being allocated to the acquisition of ICT and to capacity-building in that area, including the research and development efforts of developing countries. He also asked whether the design and conduct of distance learning ensured that the course content was relevant to the developmental needs of recipient countries by including inputs from those countries and by ensuring that the funds spent on those courses did not end up going back to where they had come from. Lastly, he asked how the international community and the private sector could speedily implement the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative and the transfer of technology to enable developing countries to enjoy the benefits of the "digital dividend".

5. **Mr. Ordzhouikidze** (Russian Federation) said that the problem of ensuring equal access to the

advantages of globalization for all countries, particularly through access to ICT and measures to overcome the negative consequences of globalization, was very topical. At the Cologne summit, the Group of Seven had called upon Governments, international organizations, the business community and civil society to take joint action to that end, but such efforts had not been matched by adequate steps to coordinate the efforts of international organizations. He asked whether any steps were being planned to coordinate the efforts of the United Nations and international financial and trade institutions to tackle the challenges of globalization and whether that approach would be reflected in the Organization's new international development strategy. Thus far, no arrangements had been made for the participation of countries that were about to join WTO in the new round of multilateral trade negotiations. He asked how WTO envisioned those arrangements and what commitments it intended to offer those countries as a condition for their participation in the new round of talks.

6. **Mr. Moore** (Director-General of the World Trade Organization) said that no new round of negotiations had yet been scheduled. If the Russian Federation joined WTO, it would do so under the existing conditions. If it did not join before the new round of negotiations, it would have the status of an observer in those talks. With respect to the suggestion by the representative of Belarus that WTO should move from consensus to voting as a means of taking decisions, he noted that consensus would be necessary to change the existing procedure and that such a consensus was unlikely. In the wake of a number of inaccurate press reports about the Ministerial Conference in Seattle, WTO was currently considering how to improve the transparency of its decision-making process. However, the failure of the Conference had been attributable not to the flaws in that process, but to the lack of agreement among the parties.

7. **Mr. Atta-ur-rahman** (Pakistan) recalled that the international financial institutions had agreed to reduce extreme poverty by 50 per cent by the year 2015. However, the *World Economic and Social Survey, 2000* had concluded that most developing countries were unlikely to experience a significant reduction in poverty in the near future. He therefore asked how the agreed target would be met. He welcomed the participation of the World Bank and other institutions in the preparatory process for the high-level

intergovernmental event on financing for development, and asked what role they intended to play in that process, in the event itself and in implementing its outcome. Lastly, he asked whether there were any plans to provide genuine debt relief to middle-income developing countries.

8. **Mr. Mutabuba** (Rwanda) said that, in considering how the technological gap between developed and developing countries could be narrowed, it must be borne in mind that relatively few people in the developing world had access to computers or telephone lines. It was hard to see how developing countries could move up the ladder of development when even the ladder was missing in those countries. The central question should be how to give the neediest people access to ICT. Even the outdated computers which the developed countries were already discarding could be of use to the developing countries in that regard.

9. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) was deeply involved in efforts to coordinate the work of the United Nations system on globalization. Three areas in which such coordination was taking place were the use of the United Nations system as a platform for intergovernmental dialogue on globalization, as in UNCTAD and the Second Committee of the General Assembly; support for countries' efforts to cope with the consequences of globalization, especially in the social field; and steps to strengthen countries' capacity to participate in the integrating world economy. In reply to the representative of Rwanda, he recalled that, at the preceding meeting, the Deputy Secretary-General had highlighted the international community's responsibility for closing the digital divide and the need for specific actions to build technological capacity and infrastructure in developing countries; proposals to that end had been put forward in the Millennium Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/2000).

10. **Mr. Karlson** (World Bank) said that international development goals had been reaffirmed at the General Assembly's recent special session for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. The data presented at that session had shown that those goals could be met; what was required was for Governments to reshape the way they did business. Specifically, they

must gain a deeper understanding of poverty as a problem of powerlessness and voicelessness; work in a more practical manner, such as through the bilateral and multilateral initiatives which were pioneering new forms of development cooperation that reduced costs and increased efficiency; and pay more attention to global public policy and global partnership.

11. With respect to the statement by the representative of Rwanda, the question to be explored was whether ICT could be used to help schools become the first rung of the “ladder” of development. In reply to the observer for Nigeria, he said that the central issue in relation to learning was not the distribution of knowledge, but the creation of a new, user-oriented culture of learning that was built from the bottom up. That was one of the political challenges of the ICT revolution.

12. **Mr. Munzberg** (International Monetary Fund) said that each of the international financial and trade institutions studied in depth the aspects of globalization that were within its area of expertise; the different perspectives of the various organizations were then brought together in periodic forums for dialogue. With respect to the high-level intergovernmental event on financing for development, the Fund would take a pragmatic approach by contributing to the documents being prepared and following the regional preparatory meetings. The intended outcome of that event would be clarified in the coming months. Lastly, a number of mechanisms were already in place to deal with the external debt of middle-income developing countries, which was a multifaceted issue.

13. **Mr. Ricupero** (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) said that the use of ICT in developing countries should be considered in terms of specific projects; a substantial number of practical initiatives for using ICT to help developing countries deal with problems more efficiently were already in place. For example, in 1993, when electronic commerce had still been a new concept, UNCTAD had developed its Global Trade Point Network; most of the trade points involved were in developing countries. Its Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) had been set up in about 70 countries, enabling them to improve the efficiency of their customs administrations and, as a result, their ability to attract foreign investment. The UNCTAD Debt Management and Financial Analysis System software package was being used in about 30 countries

and had saved those countries millions of dollars. Thus, ICT was already being used in practical ways to make countries better able to cope with globalization. Continuous learning and learning how to learn were crucial in that regard.

14. **Mr. Moore** (Director-General of the World Trade Organization) said that Governments had instructed the organizations of the United Nations system to cooperate in helping least developed countries become integrated into the global trading system, but little had been done in that regard. He hoped that the international financial and trade institutions would agree on an integrated framework whereby each of those countries would present its trade-linked development needs and the institutions would agree on the resources to be allocated to address them. WTO was currently engaged in negotiations with a view to helping developing countries comply with the agreements reached in the Uruguay Round. Globalization had not been decided upon by international organizations or corporations, it was an economic process that had been going on for many years; only the speed of that process had changed in the past decade. The countries that had been most successful in raising their people’s standard of living had been those which had embraced the opportunities afforded by globalization.

15. **The President** said that he looked forward to hearing the views of panellists on what could be done at the global level to address such central issues as connectivity, training and education, improving content and translating software, and legal and regulatory aspects.

16. **Mr. Wolfensohn** (President of the World Bank) said that there was wide agreement on the need to prevent further widening of the digital divide; the situation in that regard would indeed worsen unless the investments imbalance between developed and developing countries was rectified. A great deal could be done in individual countries and regions, provided that political leaders were willing and open-minded. The creation of an environment in which ICT could function within appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks, enabling access and low-cost connectivity to be provided, was a cost-free decision that could be taken by national authorities, which could also determine what were to be the respective roles of the public and private sectors. The approach he recommended was to provide equipment and training to

individual communities around the country and then encourage the population to set up user networks, especially in schools. The World Bank could provide a US\$ 5 million package within 60 days for any developing country to establish immediate connectivity and set up distance-learning classrooms. The Bank's experience showed that once the connectivity was available, the population at large would take the initiative.

17. The Council should not attempt to ordain specific details, but should encourage Governments to provide an environment in which ICT could flourish and to start by using computers in education, research and government. Rather than spending on study groups, money should be spent on practical local initiatives.

18. **Mr. Ocampo** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)) said that there were at least six policy areas in which national Governments could provide strong support to a process which would be led by the private sector. Those areas were education; equitable access to connectivity at the community level; promoting the extension of information technology into education, the health sector and social services; science and technology at the national level, including the development of software in languages other than English; availability of high-quality telecommunications services, which in some but not all cases could best be provided through privatization; and the provision of a sound legal infrastructure. The main task of the international community was to provide support in some of those areas; it should also monitor the impact of certain developments, such as electronic commerce, on international disparities and address the concern expressed by some Governments that e-commerce might erode their national tax base.

19. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that the Council would have an opportunity, in a subsequent meeting, to hear about the experiences of certain very poor countries which had used ICT successfully. The current discussion should focus on the digital divide in terms of the uses to which ICT was put.

20. **Mr. Moore** (Director-General of the World Trade Organization) said that, in the context of national communications policies, Governments should be aware that they would be standing in the way of

progress if they saw e-commerce as a means of generating tax revenues.

21. The international community should be aware that, in addition to the digital divide, there was also a significant "age divide". Children and young people played an important role in the promotion and development of ICT, and adults could learn a great deal from them.

22. **Mr. Mungra** (Suriname), noting that funding for environmental protection was available from the Global Environment Facility, asked for the World Bank's views on the need for a similar information and communication technologies fund. Governments should play a major role in efforts to narrow the digital divide, but financial and budgetary constraints might prevent them from doing so.

23. **Mr. Skrybant** (Poland), recalling that at the previous meeting the United States representative had proposed a new global consensus on development, asked whether the intention was that it should supersede the "Washington consensus" and whether the latter was still valid.

24. **Mr. Mutaboba** (Rwanda) said that, although Rwanda had a fully digitalized communications system, it was unable to use it fully because of insufficient support. Even if adequate numbers of computers were provided, it would still be necessary to train ICT trainers to teach the population how to use the technology. He noted that older models of computers which had been discarded in the developed countries could still be used for teaching basic computer skills in Rwanda's schools.

25. **Mr. Wolfensohn** (President of the World Bank) said that the World Bank would be glad to become involved in initiatives such as those mentioned by the representative of Rwanda. He agreed with the representative of Suriname that consideration should be given to creating an ICT fund similar to the Global Environment Facility. However, money was not the only issue. If in a particular country the conditions existed for implementing a programme to remove barriers to information technology and if the country had an appropriate institutional framework, funding would certainly be forthcoming in the form of a loan or a grant.

26. It was important to overcome the widespread reluctance among opinion-makers and government

officials to familiarize themselves with computers and Internet technology. That could be achieved by demonstrating to them that having a computer in their office gave them access to a wealth of information and could help them find solutions to a wide variety of problems. In many cases, all that was needed in a country was to make a start, whether through telemedicine, distance learning or linking communities to share information on markets. Considerable sums of money were available for grant funding, but the appropriate environment and political will must exist in a country before that funding could usefully be provided.

27. On the question of the “Washington consensus”, it was important to realize that no such consensus currently existed. There was a “Santiago consensus”, whereby it was generally agreed that economic growth was crucial for combating poverty and creating an environment conducive to growth with equity, but that attaining those goals also required effective legal and financial systems, a recognition that governance needed to be strengthened and corruption needed to be fought, and a framework in which equity was possible and rights were respected. It was also clear that basics such as education, health and communications must be taken care of and that issues such as culture, environment and rural and urban strategies must be addressed. In the coming decades, which would see considerable population growth, especially in developing economies and urban areas, structural and social conditions which preserved equity and protected the rights of individuals would be essential for achieving equitable growth and preserving peace.

28. **The President**, summing up the discussion, said that a major challenge in the current period of unprecedented growth and prosperity was to give the more than 2 billion people living in poverty access to development. ICT could play a major role in that regard by narrowing the digital divide. However, distributing the benefits of globalization where they were most needed required appropriate national policies and adequate international support. The emerging knowledge-based global economy could play an important role in accelerating growth and eradicating poverty, and facilitating countries’ integration into that global economy could make globalization work for all the world’s people.

The meeting was suspended from 4.35 to 4.50 p.m.

Panel discussion on the interconnection between information and communication technologies, finance and development

29. **The President**, opening the panel discussion, invited the panellists to give their views on the role of financial resources in the development of information technologies. Financial resources were the key to achieving connectivity and access to information technologies, which could propel small and isolated regions, as well as firms in emerging economies, directly into national, regional and global economies. He also invited the panellists to suggest what the United Nations system should do, in cooperation with Governments and financial institutions, to permit a 1 per cent write-off of the debt of any developing country which undertook to allocate an equivalent amount to ICT for development. The United Nations should work along the same lines with countries which were receiving international financing for ICT development.

30. **Mr. Iglesias** (President of the Inter-American Development Bank), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on “Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy” (E/2000/52), welcomed the report’s recommendation to national Governments and the international community to join forces in helping the developing countries harness the benefits of the knowledge-based global economy. The information technology industry was expanding rapidly and already accounted for 8 per cent of the United States economy and 6 per cent of the European economy. In the Latin American and Caribbean region, information technology was a recent phenomenon and its impact on the social, economic and political infrastructure could not as yet be properly measured. However, unless specific action was taken at the national and international levels, there was a risk that existing inequalities would increase. The private sector was playing an important role in developing information technology in the region, and Governments were becoming aware of the need for action by the public sector. Action was already being taken in some areas: human capital formation, market efficiencies, electronic commerce, empowering citizens to share in ICT access, improving the quality and scope of public social services, enhanced governance and democratic

processes, and the creation of a new information industry capable of creating thousands of new jobs.

31. The major challenge was to achieve equality of opportunity and to forge a strategic alliance between the private and public sectors and civil society in order to ensure that the new, knowledge-driven economy was socially inclusive, not exclusive. With the new instruments available, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) had the opportunity to create a new development paradigm in cooperation with the United Nations. The region needed to increase production, achieve sustainable growth, respond to unmet social demands and address the problems of poverty, social exclusion and uneven distribution of income and employment. The question was how to focus the new technologies in order to bring about a better quality of growth and greater competitiveness and to enhance the value of the instruments used to achieve social justice, thereby reconciling economic growth and social equity.

32. At its recent annual meeting, the Bank had held a seminar to study what could be achieved through the new technologies. The Bank's governors had instructed it to concentrate on four areas: increasing competitiveness, promoting integration, bringing about institutional change in Governments and fostering balanced social development. The public sector had a particular responsibility to achieve a balance between growth and equity and to ensure that the new instruments were generally accessible, thereby promoting "digital democracy" in the region. It had been decided that the Bank could act to improve the quality of education and access to education by using the new technologies. Another area for action was awareness-raising and training of community leaders. The Bank was exploring possibilities for working with civil society to set up community centres, which could play a major role in improving connectivity. It was also exploring the scope for using the new technologies to improve governance, for example, in taxation.

33. Of the five or six countries which were taking the lead in emerging ICT markets, none was in Latin America. However, there were some promising developments: 50 per cent of Costa Rica's exports were software products, and Uruguay was expanding employment opportunities in the new industries. The Bank intended to support small and medium-sized enterprises, joint ventures and pilot programmes, and was offering its member countries the chance to work

with it to develop regulatory systems for electronic commerce. Latin America had a good record in regional cooperation and the regional economic integration process dated back to the 1950s. It was important to mobilize regional cooperation to promote best practices and develop new opportunities for interregional investment. Lastly, the Declaration of Florianopolis adopted by the regional meeting held recently under ECLAC auspices had stressed the value of developing regional centres of excellence for training in the new technologies, following the example of India, which had become a major leader in the software industry as a result of its training strategies.

34. **Mr. Bedoumra** (Division Manager of the Infrastructure and Industry North Region, African Development Bank) emphasized the special problems of the African region, where 40 per cent of the population lived below the poverty threshold. Export markets for African products had been shrinking in recent years as a result of competition from international markets, investment was falling and international capital transfers to the region were relatively small. There was a consensus among the African countries themselves, and among donors and the international community, that action must be taken to reduce poverty and, to that end, to at least double the average rate of GDP growth in the region, which was now only 3.5 per cent. There was also agreement on certain priorities for action: developing human capital in the broad sense, including raising standards of education, health and nutrition; working for long-term development through environmental protection and the promotion of good governance; promoting regional integration in order to benefit from economies of scale and shared use of resources; and pursuing economic reform, which included developing the private sector and increasing investment productivity.

35. Information and communication technologies could help the African region to take a leap forward. The experience gained thus far in the field of human capital development, which underpinned development in all countries, had been encouraging: some countries had initiated distance-learning programmes in higher education and there was also vast potential for using information technology in basic education, a promising prospect in a region where 40 per cent of the population were under 15 years of age. Investment in ICT could secure low-cost access to basic education

and knowledge for all. In the health sector, one interesting example was Zimbabwe, where medical information was disseminated and orders for medicine were placed electronically.

36. In the Bank's vision of development in Africa, good governance was a priority, since it was now clear that problems of governance posed a real obstacle to development. Public funds must be properly managed and the public must be involved in development choices. Information technology could give the public access to reliable information about national and local development programmes and enable civil society to play its part in development, ensuring that the resources available to the continent were effectively deployed.

37. The question of financing was crucial, because lack of funds impeded development. Only 20.8 per cent of GDP was currently devoted to investment, compared with 24 per cent in the 1970s. In order to meet national poverty-reduction targets, that percentage must be increased to 25 to 30 per cent over the next few years. Information technology could help to develop capital markets: the Abidjan stock market had been set up by means of satellite communications, making it possible for eight countries to join. Such initiatives could help to develop infrastructure, expand markets and mobilize resources. Private sector investment in information technology had grown markedly in recent years: in 1999, bidding for mobile telephone licences in Morocco had raised US\$ 1.1 billion in State revenues, and the expansion of that sector had resulted in private sector investment of almost US\$ 120 million. That, in turn had created jobs and earned foreign exchange. Some countries, such as South Africa and Senegal, had sold their market share in the information technology industry, with the result that they had been able to invest significant sums in the social sector. There was much that countries of the region could do to restructure their economy and create an appropriate legal framework so as to encourage investment in information technology; the Bank would support their efforts. Likewise, electronic commerce was being held back by shortcomings in the banking system, caused by poor communications facilities, which resulted in a lack of reliable payments systems and bank cards. Some countries had, however, established a legal structure to promote electronic commerce.

38. The Bank was constantly seeking to contribute to the development of information technology in Africa.

It was financing telecommunications projects and computer systems and was setting up a training institute, in cooperation with the World Bank and IMF, to train African executives to work in the ICT sector. Because of the sheer scale of the funding required, all the development partners must make a joint effort to assist the continent in maximizing the potential of the ICT sector for development, whether through financial contributions or through technical support.

39. **Mr. Nag** (Deputy Director of the Programme Department (West) of the Asian Development Bank) said that the Bank's overarching goal was the reduction of poverty in a region that had the largest number of poor in the world. Information technology was one of several development tools that could be used in the gigantic endeavour to improve the situation of billions of people. In the information age, knowledge of information technology was at the cutting edge of competitiveness and wealth was in the form of patents and know-how. Information technology was a systems technology that almost defied the fundamental principles of economies of scale: the utility of the Internet, for example, rose exponentially with the number of users, with the result that networking, mergers, joint ventures and other forms of cooperation were emerging as leverage vehicles.

40. A knowledge of information technology had become an absolute necessity. In the Asia and the Pacific region, however, the digital divide was widening within and between countries. There was a dichotomy between countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan which had led the information technology revolution, or India, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong China which had become major technology exporters, and the other countries of the region which lagged behind or were cut off from the new technology. The Bank was greatly concerned that, unless that lag was remedied, information technology would fast become a greater barrier to trade than traditional barriers. The Bank therefore intended to help build up in every country of the region the kind of telecommunications infrastructure that had developed over two decades of technological progress and that was critical if countries were to make their way onto the information highway. He agreed with the representative of the World Bank that each Government must decide on the appropriate strategy for doing so.

41. Within countries as well, only those individuals who were connected to the Internet would henceforth

enjoy all the benefits of prosperity. In Asia and the Pacific, where the information revolution had thus far touched less than five per cent of the population, that meant that billions of people were without access to information and technology that was neither appropriate nor useful to anyone lacking the necessary skills or even a basic education. The Bank must therefore go back to basics — basic education, basic health care — to create an enabling environment for introducing the remaining 95 per cent of the population of the region to the benefits of information technology. Huge resources would be needed. The Bank was interested in working with the Council because information technology held tremendous potential for the development of billions of Asians. Progress in information technology must proceed on a level playing field, however; otherwise, the digital divide would be just one more thing separating the poor from everyone else.

42. **Ms. Scartezini** (Brazil) said that she joined with the President of the Inter-American Development Bank in recognizing the practical value and effectiveness of the kind of regional cooperation advocated in the Declaration of Florianopolis, and had been interested to hear how the Bank could support its proposals. The ideas put forward in the Declaration could be used as the basis for pilot projects in other developing regions as well, especially with regard to the establishment of a regional “observatory” or monitoring centre to assess the impact of the new technologies on the economy, or the establishment of small businesses on a regional scale.

43. **Mr. Jordan Pando** (Bolivia) suggested that some of the conclusions of the Florianopolis Declaration should be incorporated into the final document of the current session.

44. The digital divide already existed and education was not reaching all those who were unable to use the new technologies. Whether the digital divide grew wider or narrower depended not only on market forces but also on the political, social, educational and cultural decisions taken by Governments and educators. Countries themselves must adopt measures against discrimination and marginalization; the representative of the World Bank had been right in emphasizing the role of Governments. His remarks and those by the representatives of the regional banks should be reflected in the final report of the panel.

45. **The President** said that the important issues which had been brought to the fore would be given serious consideration and would be reflected in the Council’s final report.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.