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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 6 July 2000 at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Wibisono . . . . . (Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.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*) (E/2000/33, 50, 52, 70-74; A/55/75-E/2000/55; E/2000/CRP.2)

Opening remarks by the President of the Economic and Social Council

1. **The President** said that the Council's activities included expert panels, workshops, presentations, seminars and regional meetings and brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including Governments, business, non-governmental organizations and multilateral institutions. Those meetings yielded insights, suggestions and recommendations that should help in building coalitions and framing results-oriented policy measures.

2. They also raised some important questions that the Council could begin to consider in the next few days, questions about the characteristics and structural features of the new knowledge-based economy and the implications for developing countries; how to ensure access and connectivity for all to global information networks; how to disseminate the experience and know-how of the developing countries that had already made strides in information technology; how to ensure that ICT development benefited other sectors of the economy; how to link it to poverty eradication efforts; how to develop innovative approaches to resource allocation and incentives to attract private sector investment in ICT infrastructure; how to ensure cultural and linguistic diversity in cyberspace and include the perspective of marginalized groups in the content of the Internet; and how the United Nations system should go about mounting a well-coordinated response to the challenge of bridging the digital divide.

3. Without affordable and equitable access and connectivity, without the requisite human and institutional capacity, a country's prospects for integrating into the knowledge-based economy were dim. Without linguistically and culturally diverse digital content, a large percentage of people in developing countries might be unable to understand what was offered. Concerns about security, privacy, cultural identity, loss of revenues to e-commerce and cost factors remained to be addressed.

4. In an era of interdependence, progress could be made only through partnerships. The high-level segment now under way would provide an opportunity for forging consensus and mobilizing cooperation to launch a viable global campaign designed to empower developing countries through ICT.

Keynote address by the President of the Republic of Mali

5. **Mr. Konare** (Mali) said that he was convinced that Africa must have a voice in the future of information technology. Long alienated and dominated, Africa was now the object of intense scrutiny in the world of information. Every disaster, epidemic or conflict was broadcast swiftly around the world. But the image presented was skewed and did not represent the true face of Africa, because it was viewed always from the outside. There was urgent need for a new world information order enabling Africa to tell its own story: the story of a younger generation determined to advance; of a thousand small-scale projects for schools, health centres, wells, small enterprises; of a burning desire for democracy.

6. Africa was the world's poor relation in terms of connectivity, and even the unit cost of telephone lines, let alone the cost of equipment and software, was out of reach in many areas. The attention of Africa had been focused on information technology by the conference hosted in 1996 by the Canton of Geneva, drawing participants from both North and South to consider the possibilities for Internet development. At that conference, the decision was taken to establish an electronic link between Geneva and Bamako, Mali's capital, for consultation on information technology, and thus the Anais Network was born.

7. It had proved to be not only a new form of North-South cooperation but also an avenue for revitalizing integration among the African nations, enabling them to overcome the lack of reliable information and mutual understanding about their societies, cultures, economies and political objectives through the Internet and to seek common solutions to common problems. Moreover, Africa was now able to present itself directly to the world through hundreds of web sites.

8. At the Geneva conference, four major areas had been identified in which information technology could make an important contribution to progress in Africa, namely, education, health, democracy and the

environment. Since Geneva, Africa, convinced of the importance of information technology to its future, had had a strong presence at world events on the topic. At the Global Knowledge 97 conference held in Toronto, African delegations had elaborated the view that global knowledge was the sum total of all ways of knowing, in all their diversity, of which the purely rational approach codified by the West was only a part.

9. Development was a matter of culture, and Africa would find itself hampered by an unworkable model of development until that premise was recognized. The new technology reopened the question of what means were appropriate to a particular civilization and raised anew the spectre that the logic of money might carry all before it. Yet it also offered the opportunity for African academics, business people, decision-makers and active members of civil society to present to the world, through electronic media, their special knowledge and know-how, and the sense of African identity maintained through centuries of aggression.

10. His delegation had espoused those views at the African Development Forum organized by the Economic Commission for Africa in 1999 and at the Bamako 2000 event in March 2000, which had brought together participants from 48 countries to discuss the implications of information and communications technology in such areas as education, health, administration of decentralized communities, the media, e-commerce, sustainable development, women in the information society, benefits for the disadvantaged, collective access, appropriation of new technologies and the legal and ethical problems posed by the Internet.

11. The overarching importance of collective access and community measures had been emphasized, and that was the approach taken in Mali. Certainly, there was interest among individual consumers, a push for privatization. And, on the other hand, there were those who feared the Internet as an ideological stalking horse for the North. His country's commitment to ICT development counted on the vigilance and maturity of Africans. Its focus was on making use of all the advantages of the new technology for the benefit of the people. He therefore welcomed the Council's initiative.

12. The report of the high-level panel of experts on information and communication technology (A/55/75-E/2000/55), although it had laid bare the extraordinary inequality between regions in ICT, had also shown that some countries with an economic profile not very different from that of some African countries had made great leaps in connectivity and had reaped substantial benefits.

13. Mali had plans to introduce an Internet access point in all 701 communes. By so doing, it hoped to build up a bank of reliable statistics on resources, literacy and health; to create reliable electoral lists that would make for transparent elections; to promote the exchange of both goods and knowledge between decentralized communities that would otherwise hardly be aware of the others' existence. The cost would be high and financing hard to find, but it should not be considered an unreachable utopia or an impossible dream.

14. Africa had tremendous potential in natural and human resources but lacked the financing to realize that potential. The cost of connectivity was high, especially when so much of each country's resources went to defraying its burden of debt. Linking Africa to the world was a prime necessity, a project that would ultimately benefit the world as a whole. One of the practical proposals that had been put forward — the writing off of a percentage of the debt of developing countries — the money saved, if spent on communications infrastructure, would ultimately be of great commercial advantage to the industrialized nations as well since some part should be allowed to be spent on ICT applications in health, education and poverty eradication. Other innovative mechanisms must also be found to finance public support for development, incentives for businesses to invest, technology transfers, long-term partnerships.

15. With regard to the Internet, his country firmly advocated freedom of content, independence of access providers, commercial neutrality of instruments, absence of monopoly and freedom of expression. For all these reasons, he endorsed the recommendation of the panel of experts that universal access should be recognized as a United Nations principle. The proposal of some African scientists for an African communications satellite was a far-seeing one: Africans must not acquiesce in the marginalization of Africa.

16. His country called upon the Economic Commission for Africa to give momentum to connectivity and advocated the holding of a world summit on the information society in Geneva in 2003,

which should be the outcome of a dual preparatory process, one involving both Governments and civil society. The United Nations, from its inception the advocate for the disadvantaged, must help all the world's people prepare to be citizens of their time.

Keynote Address by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus

17. **Mr. Novitsky** (Belarus) said that the important theme under consideration by the Council reflected the United Nations unique role in promoting global development and international cooperation. Belarus fully supported the growing trend for the United Nations principal organs to undertake comprehensive reviews of the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) for development.

18. The scientific, technical, educational and production capacity of Belarus was unique among the countries in its region with economies in transition. Despite the strains of the transition period, the application of ICT in the areas of education, science, industry and governance had been consistently expanded. A special project to promote sustainable human development and create an open and democratic society with the help of the latest information and telecommunication technologies had been implemented with the involvement of the United Nations Development Programme and other partners of the Government of Belarus.

19. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development had been assisting in the advancement of technical infrastructure and legislation in the areas of telecommunication, connectivity and banking. Some foreign companies were involved, and incentives had been provided to attract foreign capital and investment in the area of technology.

20. Improvements in the national legislation and institutional capacity included establishing the protection of intellectual property rights, as part of the process of accession to the World Trade Organization. A law on electronic documents had been adopted in January 2000 as part of the enabling environment for e-commerce. The National Programme for the Development of Exports envisaged the creation of infrastructure for e-commerce and application of internationally acknowledged standards in that area.

21. Belarus had been implementing a number of ICT-related projects with other interested countries to promote regional and subregional cooperation. Active international involvement was needed, however, to manage various forms of trade in the globalizing information society, including, in particular, principles and norms of international policy in e-commerce, establishing frameworks for and harmonization of, national customs legislation, customs tariffs and duties on e-commerce transactions.

22. The Secretary-General's proposal to establish a so-called Digital Compact between the United Nations system, the private sector and non-governmental organizations merited consideration, as did the challenges of cyber crime and information terrorism; and recognition globally of norms and standards. Moreover, to achieve more effective coordination of global and regional cooperation, the work of the United Nations regional commission would be crucial.

23. Belarus welcomed the ideas and proposals contained in the report of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and supported its long-term plans to enhance the potential of countries with economies in transition, in particular in the Commonwealth of Independent States and South Eastern Europe. Belarus was ready to promote cooperation in the areas of trade, statistics, transport and standardization.

24. An open and constructive exchange of views during the session of the Economic and Social Council, to be followed by the adoption of a ministerial declaration, should facilitate the renewal of national policies of States, as well as the development of strategies and programmes for international cooperation with the support of the United Nations and its multilateral partners.

25. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General (E/2000/52), said that it was the joint product of the United Nations system in the widest sense, since it was based, not only on the thinking of the high-level panel of experts on information and communication technology, reported in A/55/75-E/2000/55, but also on contributions from all the regional commissions, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and many others. For easy reference, the full text of those inputs had been compiled in E/2000/CRP.2.

26. Their contributions expressed the great diversity of conditions, expectations and concerns and testified to the unusual effort that had gone into preparations for the session. There had been greater emphasis on bringing in representatives of industry and civil society. Another surprise was how enthusiastically industry had embraced the opportunity to take part in meetings and exhibitions. There appeared to be a general perception of the crying need for a high-level policy discussion about information technology.

27. Forums had been organized in the past on technical issues and standards or on specific applications, such as e-commerce. What had been missing was an attempt to bring all aspects together and view them from the perspective of the central role information technology was likely to play in development in the twenty-first century. The Council should be clear that the present debate was merely the beginning. Its first product should be an understanding of what issues the international community should be worrying about on the integrative policy level and what questions could be safely dealt with in specific technical forums, what matters could be left to market forces and what gaps must be filled by government.

28. The report dealt with two aspects of information technology. First, it looked at information technology as a key economic sector in its own right, as a source of jobs and trade, a subject for regulation and a user of financing. Second, it considered information technology as something that could drastically alter development prospects. It was the gap in the use made of information technology in public administration, education, health, manufacturing and business that constituted the much discussed digital divide. The task before the Council was to identify precisely what role the international system should play in both aspects of information technology. The report had a few suggestions about the form that role might take in terms of policy dialogue, support for capacity-building and construction of the broad regulatory framework.

29. **Mrs. Huebner** (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)), introducing document E/2000/72, said that the Commission had identified the major areas on which Governments, the business community, and international organizations should focus to ensure that information technology contributed to the economic and social development of Europe. They were: mass education programmes, telecommunications infrastructure and networks, the regulatory framework, and enterprise development, in particular small- and medium-sized enterprises. In the latter two areas, the Commission had accumulated particularly strong expertise and experience.

30. In collaboration with the European Messaging Association, the Commission had recently held a two-day forum on e-commerce for transition economies in the digital age, attended by over 400 high-level decision makers from the region, representing Governments, international business and international organizations. A new working party was then established with a team of specialists in Internet enterprise development to exploit the business potential of new technologies.

31. Another instrument developed by the Commission was the United Nations Centre for Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport, recently renamed as the Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business. It had six working groups and over 1,000 experts from both governments and industries, with regular meetings to develop rules for electronic business. Recommendation No. 31 adopted in March 2000 had offered the first legal framework for the Internet.

32. Another instrument had been established when CEFACT and OASIS (the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) had decided to join forces to initiate a worldwide project to standardize extensible mark-up language, so important for small businesses. That was yet another example of international partnership. Indeed, one of the best-known instruments developed by the Commission was EDIFACT, dealing with the standardization of electronic messages.

33. In the European region, the member States believed that international cooperation was essential for information technology. A Memorandum of Understanding recently signed by the Commission, the International Telecommunications Union, the International Electrotechnical Commission and the International Organization for Standardization related to electronic business, with a view to minimizing the risk of divergent and competitive approaches to standardization.

34. The Commission was also convinced of the need to cooperate with the other regional commissions for information technology, and did so in the area of

capacity-building, particularly with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). A new project had also been prepared for the countries in the Mediterranean region, with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and ECA, on capacity-building and SMEs electronic business.

35. All of the ECE activities in that area involved national administrations, the private sector, research institutes, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations.

36. **Mr. Ocampo** (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)), introducing document E/2000/74, said that the ECLAC region, like other regions of the developing world, was making efforts to adopt information technology. The region contained 8 per cent of the world's population, but only 3.5 per cent of its Internet users and less then 1 per cent of its electronic trade. However, between 1996 and 1999 there had been 40 per cent annual growth in the number of Internet subscribers in the region, and the overall growth of telecommunications in the nineties offered a favourable context for expansion. In at least some countries, there was a chance to begin to bridge the digital divide.

37. The internal digital divide was also threatening. As noted in the Declaration of Florianopolis, which was adopted at the regional meeting organized as a preparation for the present session of the Council "allowing the evolution of the information and knowledge-based society to be guided solely by market mechanisms entails the risk of an amplification of the social gaps existing within our societies, the creation of new modes of exclusion".

38. The Declaration offered a complete public agenda to promote integration of the entire region, and of all social groups within the region, in the current technological revolution. Computer literacy could be increased by means of innovative programmes of school education, technical training and non-formal education. It was recommended that regional servers contain local, national and regional information in the native and official languages of the region.

39. The public sector should directly promote the use of new technologies in the social services, especially education and health, and use the new technology to develop a more efficient and transparent public administration by offering information to citizens on management control mechanisms, services, and State contracts for goods and services through digital networks.

40. The role of the new information technologies in the process of regional economic development was also critical. The Declaration offered incentives for the development, with the participation of the academic sector of technologically based companies through the establishment of mechanisms such as venture capital funds, technological incentive zones and company incubators. It stressed the importance of developing mechanisms to ensure adequate access to new technologies for small- and medium-sized enterprises. Those processes should also serve as a framework to stimulate broad-based national and regional efforts in science and technology.

41. Those activities also required action to modernize and reorganize the infrastructure of public and private sector communications, establish high-speed networks and reduce the cost of the corresponding services. It should also provide for regulatory systems to promote competence and protection of users, including privacy, intellectual property rights and security in electronic commerce.

42. The Declaration attached importance to regional cooperation efforts in all the areas mentioned, in promoting joint technical-commercial initiatives, cooperation on matters of public policy, including the joint participation in the relevant international forums and the setting-up of a regional observatory to monitor the impact of the new technologies. Also, it stressed the importance of securing technical and financial cooperation from the international community, with the active participation of the relevant private enterprises. Such cooperation could include innovative mechanisms to reduce external debt by allocating resources to technology.

43. **Mr. El-Belawi** (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), introducing document E/2000/71, said that the performance improvements and constant cost reductions in ICTs had monumental socio-economic and cultural implications.

44. Maximizing the benefits while avoiding negative effects of the ICT revolution posed enormous challenges for policy makers. The developing countries were giving top priority to tackling issues of inadequate infrastructure, resource levels and legislative frameworks, as well as cultural and linguistic specific characteristics. ICT infrastructure

indicators in the ESCWA member countries invariably fell below world averages, and often below developing country averages in the case of non-oil producing countries.

45. ICTs greatly facilitated the achievement of numerous sustainable development goals. Furthermore, coupled with the growing predominance of demand factors in determining economic success, ICTs offered hope for developing economies in the global market. Indeed, the catalytic role played by well-designed ICT capabilities should bring immense benefits for both the developing and developed countries. That was contingent, however, upon the existence of appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks.

46. In the long and medium terms national ICT policies and related action plans needed to address goals such as instituting changes in attitudes and revolutionizing educational systems. More urgent objectives, to be targeted in the short term, should include modern infrastructures, specialized institutional arrangements, human resource development programmes, and specific ICT capabilities in selected priority sectors.

47. Assisting member countries in devising suitable policies, building basic ICT infrastructures and associated services and acquiring effective capacity was a priority consideration for the United Nations system and for donor organizations. Coordination efforts should target harmonization of work programmes at the earliest possible opportunity. ICT capacity-building should be among the themes given special emphasis by all United Nations organizations in the formulation of their medium-term plans for the years 2000-2005.

48. Building modern ICT infrastructure would have to be firmly based on cooperation among government departments, local and international enterprises and a variety of non-governmental organizations.

49. An international conference should be convened under the auspices of the United Nations to discuss trends in the emerging global knowledge-based economy, ICT capacity-building, and development priorities.

50. Regional initiatives should make use of economic, social, cultural and linguistic similarities between groups of member countries, such as ESCWA member countries and neighbouring Arab States, in order to ensure optimal connectivity, harmonized standards and conservation of resources.

51. Immense opportunities would result from research activity targeting advanced computer software systems to facilitate knowledge creation and management using the Arabic language. Establishing centres of excellence for software research and development and advanced training of software researchers and developers at the regional level would go a long way towards meeting such goals. Similarly, setting up regional hardware manufacturing and assembly facilities would assist wider dissemination of modern ICTs. Concerned parties, including national educational and research institutions as well as business enterprises and non-governmental organizations should initiate cooperation in establishing and operating such institutions.

52. ESCWA had held an expert panel on information technology on 15-16 May 2000, with special emphasis on: information technology and the knowledge-based economy; the status of information and communication technology in selected ESCWA member States; capacity-building in priority areas of information and communication technologies; emerging issues in information and communication technologies and their applications. The panel's recommendations were the basis of the ESCWA contribution to the present High-level Segment of the Council.

53. **Mr. Amoako** (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)), introducing document E/2000/70, said that the rapid expansion in Africa of the use of the new ICTs was one of the most positive stories emerging from the region. By the end of 1999 virtually all capitals in Africa had access to the Internet, rates of telephone line growth were at their highest ever levels, and hundreds of new media outlets in print, radio, television and the Web had emerged in the past few years. Many African institutions and individuals were using the new technologies to expand their capabilities in the key development sectors of education and health, to enhance income and to improve governance.

54. African States were applying national strategies for accelerating development of information infrastructure with most countries separating postal services from telecommunications, and many instituting a separate regulatory authority.

55. ECA believed that ICTs offered the best hope for developing countries to leverage their potential and engage with the information economy. ICTs were not an alternative to but a necessary component of poverty alleviation. Their essential contribution lay in their power to expand individual and collective human capacities. To that end, more attention had to be given to the need for rapid expansion of ICT skills and the limited absorptive capacity in countries, as many projects failed because of limited implementation skills. New resources should not be directed mainly to the relative "haves" in terms of ICT capacities; projects had to cater to different skill levels and include significant training components.

56. ECA had been working on an information-based society for global development for a long time, but the pace of its work had accelerated with the launching of the African Information Society Initiative in 1996 by African Ministers of Finance and Planning. In 1999 it had convened the first African Development Forum on the challenge to Africa of globalization and the information age. The strategy that had emerged from that forum recognized the importance of ICT applications in education, health and e-commerce, as well as the need for more effective and informed policy reform. The success of ICT applications would depend on their capacity to marry African content with materials generated elsewhere.

57. ECA's role was that of advocate, convenor and catalyst of ICT development and application in Africa. Implementation came through its national partners and the Partnership for Information Technology in Africa, a broad-based coalition of public and private sector institutions.

58. While ECA welcomed the global approaches proposed in the Secretary-General's report and a more concerted United Nations effort on information technology and development issues, it was acutely aware that strong African leadership was needed to grasp the opportunities that global programmes offered and shape them to African realities.

59. Africa's needs should receive priority attention in any new programmes that emerged from the present discussions. ECA was ready to work with organizations to refine the database on readiness to participate in the information society as a foundation for the development of operational programmes at the country level.

60. **Mr. Mizuta** (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)) said that the ESCAP region was marked by tremendous diversity in all aspects of the development process, with a close correlation between the overall level of economic and social development and information technology applications and production.

61. The digital divide had increasingly deepened within and across countries in the ESCAP region. Information technology had emerged as an important enabling technology which could accelerate socio-economic development and improve the quality of life. However, public understanding and awareness was essential for effective implementation of action plans. In the emerging liberalized and highly competitive business environment, the use of information technology was imperative to maintain competitiveness at both corporate and national levels.

62. The Regional Round Table held in New Delhi from 21 to 22 June had adopted a series of recommendations for national and regional action, including the formulation of a national readiness index for each country and the development of models for partnerships between government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations for integrating ICT into the economy and society. The Round Table emphasized the need for extensive human resource development, and the importance of e-governance and community participation. Regional cooperation, including South-South cooperation was a useful means to provide technical assistance to developing member States.

63. The Indian Minister of Information Technology, as the keynote speaker at the Regional Round Table, had noted that whereas the industrial revolution had been competitive in nature and had required capital, the information technology revolution was cooperative in nature, and the technology was not diluted when shared with millions or billions of people.

64. **Chief Banigo** (Observer for the Federal Republic of Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the challenge facing developing countries was to ensure that the potential of the digital revolution was harnessed to enhance growth, facilitate the eradication of poverty and promote sustainable development.

65. Since the beginning of the year 2000, a number of programmes had been launched to sensitize the entire

international community to the value of information and communications technologies (ICT). In recognition of the need rapidly to adapt to ICT, participants at the South Summit of the Group of 77 in April 2000 had examined the issue of knowledge and technology. In the Havana Programme of Action, they had noted the shift from manufacturing to information and knowledge-based production over the previous two decades, but they lamented the fact that developing countries were lagging behind. Coherent policies and appropriate strategies must be adopted to address the infrastructure, financial and training problems which impeded efforts to capture benefits from information technology. The very nature of the complexities of ICT made concerted international cooperation an absolute necessity and it was therefore crucial to remove the barriers in developed countries which restricted the ability of developing countries to profit from ICT. The United Nations could play a central role in that regard due to its legitimacy and the scope of its mandate, which encompassed all spheres of human endeavour. The Group of 77 supported the creation of the United Nations ICT task force as proposed by the high-level panel of experts on information and communication technology.

66. The goals and expectations for the use of ICT included poverty eradication, access to education, improved health systems and technology transfer. To that end, the international community should encourage a more equitable distribution of the economic benefits generated by ICT, the adoption of innovative approaches, such as community connectivity; the enhancement of capacity and institution building, the development of local content and the incorporation of private sector expertise. It was therefore imperative to forge partnerships between governments, civil society, international organizations and private sector corporations which were at the cutting edge of technology.

67. In conclusion, he said the Group of 77 wished to reiterate that the international community, multilateral trade and financial institutions and the United Nations system had the primary obligation to ensure the full integration of developing countries into the global economy.

68. **Mr. Duffour** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that in spite of its positive aspects, the newly emerging information society also presented challenges of extraordinary complexity relating to territorial regulation, new forms of crime and the protection of privacy. It was only by raising awareness that it would be possible to implement policies promoting equal access to information technologies. In some countries factors such as infrastructure, illiteracy and cost restricted access to ICT and many initiatives to bridge the digital divide had already been launched by donor countries, multilateral development organizations, the European Union, Commonwealth nations and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

69. The Economic and Social Council should adopt a global strategy based on clear and comprehensible objectives laying down the main principles of United Nations action in the field of ICT. Such a strategy would also promote the mobilization of private funds to finance the development of those technologies in developing countries. The European Union fervently hoped that the high-level segment of the current session would act as a catalyst for the launching of special projects, particularly in the field of education, training and aid for the development of local content. The European Union was prepared to play an active role to help narrow the digital divide through international consultations, its relations with development partners at national and regional levels, and through multilateral institutions, focusing on topics of prime interest such as the concept of usage and the fight against cybercrime. It wished to further examine the recommendations outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2000/52), taking into account the disparity between countries, the diversity of partners and the need for pragmatism.

70. **Mr. Gumelar** (Indonesia) said that no country could isolate itself from the knowledge-based global economy without incurring tremendous costs. Cooperation was crucial in fostering the effective participation of developing countries in ICT, and to that end Indonesia had provided forums for the promotion of telecommunication and information technologies at the domestic, regional and international levels. Underscoring the importance of encouraging partnerships for the effective application of ICT to development, he noted that universal access and connectivity required political commitment, increased investment, technology transfer, training, research and the adaptation of ICT for the benefit of small- and medium-sized enterprises.

71. The United Nations should continue to play a central role in mobilizing resources to ensure universal access. It was well positioned to build partnerships to foster knowledge flows for development based on agreed principles and objectives. Furthermore, the various bodies of the United Nations system should continue to lead the way in adopting an ICT strategy to encourage coordination and synergy among programmes and activities.

72. The international community should express its commitment to bridge the digital divide and foster digital opportunities through firm action. The current discussions, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, held great promise as a step towards laying a fresh foundation for the poorest countries to accrue some of the benefits of a growing and prosperous world economy.

73. **Ms. Sydnes** (Norway), highlighting the success of ICT in revitalizing international trade and development, cautioned that there was no substitute for making the right political choices. She reiterated the point made during the opening session that it was time to reinvest the peace dividend in development and poverty reduction.

74. The dominance of ideas and values originating in developed countries and reflecting Western culture had the potential to conflict with the values of local communities elsewhere. Cyberspace was not a value-neutral area and the Internet should never become an ethics-free zone, or a place where the rule of law did not apply. While endorsing the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the creation of knowledge locally, cultural intrusion, language barriers and the social impact of the new economy, she welcomed the establishment of the Health InterNetwork as a practical example of how new technology could be applied to meeting basic human needs.

75. Norway had been placing increasing emphasis on ICT as an integral part of its development policy and was in the process of formulating its ICT strategy. She urged greater commitment to the adoption of appropriate policies and action to include women in the opportunities created by new technologies, and called for a reversal in the decline in official resource flows. The Norwegian Government was ready to do more than its share and welcomed stiffer competition from other donors.

76. **Mr. Heinonen** (Observer for Finland) said that information and communication technology provided every country with new opportunities to succeed in the digital economy. Indeed, information and knowledge represented a global public good. However, there was a clear concentration of communications businesses in the hands of a few large multinational companies. That was not a desirable trend, since the concentration of ownership killed competition and tended to hamper innovations. Consequently, it was the role of governments to create an enabling environment for businesses operating in the information and communication technologies sector.

77. The Finnish Government's policy of encouraging competition had paid off handsomely, spawning good results such as high mobile phone penetration, low prices and good quality communications services. In coming years, the communications industry would take a big step forward through the introduction of third-generation mobile communications solutions. The development of the mobile market would be extremely important for the new economy and electronic commerce. That was why he was somewhat worried about the way that licences for third-generation mobile systems had been auctioned off. In many countries, the prices of such systems had increased considerably. High prices hindered the use and spread of new services and would affect developing countries in particular. Moreover, auction fees also favoured unhealthy competition leading to an even greater domination of the market by huge multinationals.

78. Finland, which had always aimed at an equal and socially inclusive information society, believed that such a society called for deliberate political decisions and the willingness at the national level to update social and economic structures. Information and communication technology should ensure that all sectors of society were provided with equal opportunities.

79. The most important investments required for the information society were those in education and social welfare. In that regard, governments themselves could play a major role in setting examples. They should be active users of information and communication technologies and invest heavily in public electronic services such as electronic health systems and electronic learning while encouraging new forms of participation, especially at the local level. For their part, developing countries needed to develop national

strategies on information technology to promote the use of such technologies.

80. Noting that developing countries were facing the problems of connectivity, capability and content, he emphasized the need for wide cooperation between different partners such as bilateral and multilateral development actors and the private sector in order to build the necessary infrastructure and nurture skills and business opportunities. It was important for developed countries to share their experience with developing countries, although the starting point for development must be national or even local, taking into account the prevailing conditions in each developing country, including language and culture. Private sector investment was required to create basic infrastructure; governments could assist the private sector by promoting competition and abolishing obstacles to entrepreneurial activities and eliminating additional tariffs, customs duties and/or taxes.

81. Information and communication technologies could play a major role in accelerating growth, eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development, thus helping developing countries to integrate into the global economy. The United Nations, in particular through the Economic and Social Council, should play an active role.

82. **Mr. Gutierrez** (Costa Rica) said that the challenge was harnessing ICT so as to narrow the "digital divide" between "information rich" countries and "information poor" countries. Those strategies must be based on national policies, which in turn must be supported by enhanced international cooperation. They must be coherent, effective and equitable.

83. Governments needed to play a major role in simplifying the mechanisms that would facilitate the integration of their countries into the global economy; they should be facilitators, not obstacles. Moreover, while the creation of a paper-free government environment was essential, it was equally important to protect electronic information through security protocols in order to combat cyber-crime.

84. Access to new technologies would also depend on changes in attitude among decision makers as well as among the general population, in particular with respect to how public affairs were conducted. His Government, which believed in the democratization of knowledge, had established a programme of free access to electronic mail in all the post offices and municipalities of the country. In the area of education, the goal was to attain 50 per cent computer coverage at the elementary school level and full coverage at the secondary school level. An interactive web site that gave citizens access to the full range of public services had been created. However, there was a need to strengthen human resources in information technology industries and to promote the development of local software. Accordingly, he welcomed the World Bank's proposal to establish a fund for developing countries' initiatives in the area of information and communication technologies. In any case, Costa Rica was prepared to share its experiences through international cooperation.

85. The path ahead was difficult, since developing countries were facing structural obstacles such as the shortage of financial resources and skilled labour, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure and the lack of an Internet content in their languages. Those obstacles had to be overcome. Each country and the international community as a whole had to make a commitment to narrowing the gap between rich and poor countries. The United Nations must play a key role in that regard by focusing development policies on a more efficient and equitable use of the digital revolution aimed at achieving enhanced economic and social development.

86. **Mr. Rodriguez Plana** (Cuba) said that it was an irony that mankind had more and better tools than ever to combat poverty, yet poverty was growing and spreading more rapidly throughout the world. The development of information and communication technologies had actually widened the gap between the rich and the poor. In fact, the ICT revolution was only reproducing, albeit at a faster pace, the inequalities and imbalances that already existed in an unfair world economic order. Developing countries were extremely concerned about the fact that certain countries, especially the United States of America, were engaged in a frenetic race for intellectual property rights covering not only the technologies themselves but also the ideas upon which the new economy was based, thus creating insurmountable obstacles for developing countries that needed such ideas and technologies for basic uses such as distance education or telemedicine.

87. Access to information and knowledge was basically determined by connectivity, available capacity and the content of the information transmitted. However, developing countries were impeded in their efforts to reach those goals by a shortage of human

resources and of a minimum infrastructure. It was equally important and necessary to develop a culturally linguistic digital space which mirrored the diversity of the world in order to combat the new form of colonialism being imposed by the transnationals.

88. The plunder of third world countries had been extended to the area of human resources. Indeed, it was paradoxical that developing countries which had trained through great efforts and sacrifices specialists and scientists who were indispensable for national development found that they were powerless to prevent those talents from emigrating to industrialized countries that had put into place official policies geared to resolving their own deficit in specialists.

89. While no one doubted the vital role that information and communication technologies could play in promoting development, they would have very little impact if their introduction did not go hand in hand with comprehensive social development programmes in the countries of the Third World. Indeed, the Internet was meaningless to the half of humankind that had never spoken on a telephone, it was pointless to discuss the excellence of software and intangible goods with the almost 1 billion people who suffered from hunger and had no access to medical services. Consequently the top priority of the strategy for the development and dissemination of information and communication technology throughout all sectors of Cuban society was the training of human resources, especially of young people. The computerization programme of Cuban society gave precedence to those areas of activity with the greatest social impact, such as health and education. It was therefore important to establish national policies and strategies that took into account the particular circumstances of each country.

90. In addition, a fundamental change and decisive action by the international community were needed to keep the disparity in access to information and knowledge from becoming more acute. The recognition of the principle of the universal right to information presupposed the establishment of a new international communication and information order, which would ensure a more equitable distribution of digital content and reflect its linguistic and cultural diversity. In that connection, the United Nations should play a central role in worldwide efforts to coordinate the implementation of an international plan of action that would ensure that developing countries benefited from and participated in the digital revolution. South-South cooperation was an important dimension of international cooperation in that area. The recent South Summit held in Havana had stressed the need to give impetus to such cooperation as an effective instrument for maximizing the collective potential of the South and promoting development through the mobilization and exchange of human resources. That endeavour required the strong backing of developed countries.

91. **Mr. Intini** (Italy) said that the revolutionary qualities of the new technologies provided an enormous potential for helping to reduce poverty, foster sustainable development, empower people, build capacities and skills, facilitate new and transparent government mechanisms and reinforce popular participation and informed decision-making at all levels. However, the question of access to the new technologies could not be described solely in terms of the cost of computer literacy and training. It also concerned the delicate issue of respect for cultural differences. Indeed, a “digital divide” threatened to widen the gap between and within countries.

92. Italy, in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, had organized in Bologna, in June 2000, a High-level Conference of Ministers responsible for SMEs and Industry Ministers. The Conference had made recommendations for measures to enable small and medium enterprises to benefit from the global economy and technological progress. The final document, the Bologna Charter on SME Policies, had noted with interest the Italian Government’s proposal for an international network of small and medium enterprises and welcomed Italy’s offer to conduct the related feasibility study. He fully shared the suggestion made by the French Presidency of the European Union that a system of community access to the new instruments should be developed as well as local education and training projects. Noting the connection between the Council’s proceedings and the preparation of the Millennium Summit, he said that the emphasis should be on the human factor with massive investment in education and training, bearing in mind that globalization should also mean overcoming mono-cultural models in favour of broader contents and languages. More balanced relations should be fostered between politics and economics through coordinated efforts to develop guidelines and a common language at the international level in order to make the

knowledge-based society a pillar of democracy and citizen participation in public life.

93. He announced that Italy would organize the third conference of the "Global Forum on Re-inventing Governments" in Naples from 15-17 March 2001. It was of paramount importance that there should be a convergence of the new technologies such as the Internet, mobile telephones, digital applications and the traditional instruments of mass communications such as television and radio. Such convergence would help to make interactivity and widespread distribution mutually reinforcing and should be based on a concept of connectivity that went beyond individual, private use of the computer and emphasized instead a community approach in a multimedia perspective. Further depth would be lent to that perspective by the fifth World Television Forum to be held at the United Nations in November of the current year. The Forum would bring together representatives of Governments, international organizations and the media in a constructive and forward-looking dialogue which could emphasize that information and communication technology as well as globalization offered great opportunities but also entailed some risks.

94. The United Nations should give a new political and institutional legitimacy to wider, more systematic collaboration between the public and private sectors at the international level in order to help to lay down the conditions for innovative responses to the challenges of globalization. The ultimate goal was to create positive interaction between information and communication technology, sustainable development, poverty eradication and political democracy, thereby enhancing efforts to prevent conflicts and maintain international peace and security.

95. **Mr. Pleuger** (Germany) said that information and communication technologies had become a driving force for economic development. New services, new areas of economic activity and new career patterns were emerging, with a great demand for employees in the field. Intellectual and business potential could be tapped, regardless of geographical location, offering new opportunities to all, including the developing countries. The Internet could in principle be accessed by anyone and allow everyone, including users from developing countries, to exchange information and enter the global market under approximately the same conditions. Such global competition in turn ensured efficiency, low prices and rapid innovation and fostered better cooperation between industrialized and developing countries. The private sector was and remained the motor. The liberalization of telecommunications markets and the provision of high-performance software and hardware made opportunities available to small- and medium-sized enterprises worldwide, creating new, global business and user cultures and new markets.

96. It was the responsibility of Governments for their part to create a uniform global legal framework and to foster the use of global networks by ensuring equal access and guaranteeing freedom of information. International efforts were also needed to prevent cybercrime and guarantee security for e-commerce transactions.

97. The Economic and Social Council, as the central organ in the field, had to ensure that United Nations institutions and agencies like the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) rose to the development challenges presented by information and communications technology in their own work and in their work with multilateral donors. The task of both the international community and individual governments was to help mould the social transformation resulting from the new opportunities for economic development and personal development offered by the Internet, to create the conditions for healthy competition and to provide the necessary training.

98. People remained at the heart of the global information society and would require appropriate basic education in the new technologies and mastery of the necessary techniques. Developing the new curricula locally at all levels would require new forms of cooperation between business and the State. For its part, his Government had adopted an action programme for the dissemination and use of the new technologies and it was actively involved in the European Union action plan and programmes as well.

99. Four elements were essential worldwide: education to enable people to take advantage of the opportunities; privatization to reduce costs and broaden access; open markets providing access to small countries and companies; and cooperation between the public and the private sectors.

100. **Ms. O'Donnell** (Observer for Ireland) observed that the impact of globalization was not universally positive: it effectively marginalized least developed countries in the world trade system and created

growing income disparities both within and between countries. The "digital divide" was a particularly notable feature of the general global divide in research and technology capacity.

101. With so much more to be done in reducing the scourge of poverty worldwide, the international community must reflect on how the powerful new technologies could help to eradicate extreme poverty, and it must in particular explore in more detail the possibility of having poor nations skip a step in the process of developing a national telecommunications infrastructure. Information and communication technologies were of great potential benefit to governments and organizations providing goods and services to very poor people because they enabled the best possible use to be made of scarce resources. In the wider development picture, the focus must be kept on basic education, basic health, and food security, which were at the core of poverty eradication.

102. The international community must foster the involvement of the private sector, coordinate the activities of the many multilateral agencies now dealing with information technology issues, and develop a global consensus on the role of those technologies in dealing with poverty. Ireland therefore supported the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a centralized United Nations information technology service to obviate the need for separate information and technology components within each agency. A case might also be made for establishing an integrated framework for the delivery of information and communication technology assistance to least developed countries. However, it was vital that the countries themselves should always define their own needs in responding to international efforts. The United Nations must also explore innovative ways of attracting private sector investment in the provision of necessary goods and services. It might in addition be useful to establish a small expert group to advise the Secretary-General on information and communication technologies and provide the kind of radical thinking that the sector demanded.

103. The development of a national information technology strategy along the lines proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (E/2000/52) required strong political leadership to keep all sectors moving in the right direction, at the right pace and without duplication. The transformation into a knowledge-based economy must be mainstreamed into all sectors of government and into the economy as a whole. In Ireland's case, investment in education had been fundamental, as had the creation of a public-private partnership to finance arrangements for international connectivity.

104. **Mr. Ollila** (Observer for NOKIA) said that in the new economy, technical progress drove improved productivity which, in turn, drove economic growth and job and wealth creation. Access to knowledge as such had never been easier, nor had the sharing of information across geographical boundaries. However, all parts of society, public and private had to work together to make access to the new technology a reality. The telecommunications and information technology sectors must produce accessible technologies in terms of features, functionality and affordability.

105. In an incredibly short time, the Internet had shown that sharing digitalized information through the convergence of computing and communications created more revenue and value, as clearly demonstrated in the booming Internet economy in which new businesses were created with low initial investment and high expertise. Such an open economy allowed "leapfrogging" beyond past information generations by any nation or individual with access to the Internet. International protection of intellectual property according to globally agreed standards would further guarantee access to information for developing nations. Any developing country with a focused national technology policy that opened its markets to high technology investments and encouraged competition would be able to play a role in cutting-edge technologies and technical innovation.

106. The competence of national telecommunications operators also played a key role, while not excluding competitive foreign operators. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) could be very instrumental in developing alternative telecommunications systems in developing countries lacking landline telephones. In the developing countries it was not the technology itself but the financial, institutional, political and human factors that often remained a barrier to technological progress, and a digital bridge had to be built between developing and developed countries, in cooperation with industry.

107. In any society, it was education that would accommodate information technology to the common

good. The international community, industry and governments all needed to take seriously the responsibility that came with working in the global arena, by creating an open economy and offering broad basic education that was relevant to their current requirements.

108. **Mr. Rodrigues** (Observer for COMPAQ) said that the Internet had become an agent of rapid change in the most significant social and economic revolution in recent history. The speed of the projected global technological developments was in itself impressive: more than 350 million Internet users expected by the year 2003; more than 550 million users of mobile wireless devices by 2002; and, with the convergence of those two technologies, access to the Internet by more than 1 billion wireless devices by 2005. Yet the human impact of the Internet, fast becoming the dominant means of business worldwide, on the social standards and economic development was by far the most significant.

109. At COMPAQ, the focus was on solutions that would extend the power and reach of the emerging "one world network" — fuelled by the growth of the Internet — that could bridge the gap between developing and developed nations. The technical capabilities were in place, and governments and private individuals must now invest in the infrastructure required to provide universal access to that powerful new network. The advent of global wireless technology offered the many countries in the developing world which had not had the resources to build the expensive telephone and computer wired networks previously required for access the opportunity to move straight to wireless solutions. In Latin America, for instance, mobile phones had already replaced landline phones as the primary method of communication. Technology alone, however, was not enough; education would be required to introduce the new concepts to people who had not yet participated in the Internet age.

110. Information technology held exciting potential for individuals and small businesses. It would soon be possible to provide basic home-based education and health and human services in the developing world and dramatically improve public safety. Small businesses in the developing world that now had only limited access to markets and were therefore dependent on global distributors would be able, through the Internet, to take their goods and services directly to global markets, allowing them to compete with larger corporations. Once third-world countries were given the tools to change the rules of international commerce, they could take advantage of their greater creativity.

111. There were, of course, some technical challenges ahead for information technology providers. The freedom to grow in a cost-effective way must be factored into every plan. Security and the protection of privacy should also be secured. COMPAQ's experience with some of the largest information technology networks in the financial, telecommunications and Internet areas could be transferred to the emerging economies, and the best practices learned could be shared with them. Together, the resources and capabilities of private enterprise and the commitment of the world's governments to bettering the quality of life of their citizens would make the promise of the wireless Internet a reality.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.