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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 7 July 2000 at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Wibisono . . . . (Indonesia)
     later: Mr. Pramatarski (Vice-President)   . . . . (Bulgaria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (*continued*) (E/2000/65, E/2000/82)

1.   The President, referring to annex I, paragraph 53 of General Assembly resolution 50/227, drew the Council's attention to document E/2000/65 entitled "Themes for the high-level and coordination segments of the substantive session of 2001 of the Economic and Social Council". He noted further that in the report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (E/2000/82) the date should read 23 June 2000 in the first line of paragraph 1. He took it that the Council agreed to hear statements by the non-governmental organizations listed in the document.

2.   *It was so decided.*

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, E/2000/50, E/2000/52, A/55/75-E/2000/55, E/2000/L.9)

Keynote address by Mr. Naidoo of South Africa

3.   **Mr. Naidoo** (Independent consultant and former Minister for Communications of South Africa) endorsed the President of Mali's statement that there were beacons of hope in the gloomy picture often painted of Africa. As a former Minister for Communications, he had participated in 1996 in a programme of modernization of telecommunications in South Africa which would soon link every part of the country by telephone. The technology that enabled him to participate in the Council's current high-level segment by videoconference placed countries in the developing world in a unique position, since they would be able to make a quantum leap into the future. While Africa lagged behind in the area of education, it was in a position to move from that situation to one of skilled human resources. Moreover, since the continent had very little infrastructure, it could invest in the most modern equipment.

4.   The global village could not continue to grow without including Africa or the rest of the developing world; nor would their exclusion be a recipe for global peace or sustainable human development, for which the United Nations had been established. Technology provided the most potent weapons in the struggle against oppression, poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. It challenged the economic and political leadership who often felt threatened by the new technology because it demanded greater transparency and accountability. It had the fundamental ability to deepen democracy and give everyone access to education and knowledge so that they could exercise their rights as human beings, rights that the United Nations must protect and help to advance.

5.   Technology challenged Governments to create an enabling environment for private investment by working out appropriate rules and regulations. As the boundaries that separated countries collapsed, they must start to think in terms of regional cooperation by developing regional projects with economies of scale. In particular, there was a need to clearly separate the role of government from the role of independent regulators. Any blurring of that line could kill efforts to attract investments.

6.   Technology also challenged countries to effect market liberalization and to introduce new players which could lead, inter alia, to lower costs. Universal service obligations should be imposed on operators including the right of access to the Internet.

7.   Governments were further obligated to provide the education and training enabling young people to become part of the knowledge-based economy and compete as equals with their peers in the more privileged and affluent societies. Finally, they were challenged to ensure the financing of information infrastructure and its applications. In that regard, he was convinced that a partnership between the development capital available from multilateral organizations, especially the World Bank, and operators and Governments in the developing world, could drive the expansion of technology infrastructure in the developing world. Corporate governance would be necessary in view of the huge impact that the information revolution would have on development.

8.   A level playing field was a prerequisite. People in the developing world felt increasingly excluded from playing a role in shaping the rules of the new game. That situation was dangerous since it entrenched the mentality of haves and have nots, and appeared to be transforming the information revolution into one of infocolonialism.

9.   He appealed to the United Nations to play a leading role in the protection and defence of the

political and economic progress of the poor. The technological revolution could be a powerful leveller and could reduce inequality in the world. By embracing the new technologies, many backward economies had made tremendous social strides. While economic independence was more pronounced today than ever before because of technology, it was increasingly seen as benefiting and empowering only the forces of capital and the rich economies of the industrialized world. He therefore called for a partnership between the North and South and, in particular, between the private and public sectors, which would hold the promise of bringing sustainable development to the South. While Africa's current dire situation was partly due to dictatorships and blatant corruption, it was mainly caused by the Afro-pessimism that was at the heart of the continent's marginalization. The single biggest human development challenge of the twenty-first century was integrating Africa into the global information society.

10. While African leaders would ultimately have to find African solutions to Africa's problems of connectivity and development, they needed the moral, political and economic support of the United Nations. Indeed, the United Nations must intervene to avert a potential human disaster and bureaucratic hurdles should not be allowed to stand in the way of any efforts in that regard. African leaders wanted to see action and a new global initiative. They hoped that the international community would respond with friendship, support and solidarity to help Africa regain its rightful place in the global community of nations.

Keynote address by Mr. McConnell

11. **Mr. McConnell** (President, McConnell International LLC and Facilitator, ICT Focal Point Network for the United Nations Working Group on Informatics) said that the United Nations had played a unique role in coping with the year 2000 problem. The Working Group on Informatics, in cooperation with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations organizations and development banks, and over 20 private sector organizations, had built a trusted global network of year 2000 coordinators and public and private sector experts. After the year 2000 problem had been successfully dealt with, it had been decided that the network should continue to operate to tackle other global ICT issues in the future. It had been hoped that

the current session of the Council would decide to create a sustainable means of bringing ICT officials together so that they could work across national boundaries informally and effectively.

12. A new network of ICT focal points from the Governments of 120 countries, many of them ministers or deputy ministers, were now participating in an electronic web. The principal issue that the group had addressed to date was information security. For example, in the wake of the love bug virus and the inability of the Philippine Government to prosecute the suspects, the computer crime laws of member countries had been collected. As soon as a sponsor was found, those laws would be published on the Web along with an analysis and discussion of best practices. However, that effort was not enough. There was a need to share the best practices in using information for development, such as those that were laid out in the Secretary-General's report, to save countries from wasting precious time. A permanent trusted network of Governments needed to be established to engage in cooperation with a broad-based group of private-sector organizations.

13. The success of the year 2000 network, had shown that a Government-to-Government network was an important way for Governments to consult among themselves; that the private sector should be represented by groups of companies, not individual firms; and that the task force should meet in person as well as on-line. It was vitally important for the network to get to work as soon as possible and for it to be supported by the United Nations as well as other multilateral institutions to ensure that it was effective.

14. The threat of an ever-expanding, unbridgeable digital divide was now a bigger threat than the year 2000 problem. Should that divide become a reality, the liberating potential of information technology would have been squandered and a great opportunity to bring the world into a twenty-first century that was equitable and humane would have been lost. Information and communication technologies had, inter alia, already brought about rapid economic growth, slowed down rural-urban migration, reduced fraud and corruption and improved the delivery of health care. The United Nations was in a unique position to make a difference in the outcome and to turn the digital divide into a true digital opportunity.

15. **Mr. Genatios Sequera** (Venezuela) said he was not sure that the development of information technologies and the strengthening of the digital economy could guarantee global development and eradicate poverty. However, he was convinced that the necessary efforts had to be made to develop information technologies to which everyone could have access.

16. The best option for growth in the digital society by combating poverty and overcoming underdevelopment was to give priority to improving human resources, thus enhancing the opportunities for developing potential internal markets and building capacities. In that regard, it was vital to establish regional strategies to promote social development through job creation and the strengthening of regional markets within a global perspective. The integration of Latin America and the Caribbean was based on linguistic affinity which must be taken full advantage of while it lasted.

17. Education was vital to the development of human resources and to progress in the area of information and communication technologies. Efforts should therefore be made to improve the level of connectivity and promote the training of instructors and teachers within the framework of comprehensive development. Moreover, special efforts should be made to ensure that loans negotiated with multilateral financial organizations could be provided through simplified and standardized procedures, which could lead to lower costs and easier access. The possibility of applying special procedures such as those employed for year 2000 emergencies should be evaluated. Moreover, loans that promoted regional integration based on joint proposals of various countries with respect to the development of information technologies could be considered as priorities. He noted the efforts being made in his country to change attitudes and create a better environment for the development of information technologies, including the adoption of a new act on telecommunications that encouraged private investment. That act had led to the establishment of a universal fund and a research and development fund. Moreover, a government decree on the Internet had been promulgated as a national priority.

18. He stressed the need for regional observatories on information and communication technology to enhance knowledge of the region's potential capacity and offer greater prospects for better research and development and education. Regional seminars should also be organized before the end of the current year in order to establish a strategy for promoting educational reforms in the region. In that regard, he invited countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region to attend a seminar to be organized in Venezuela in October on education and information technologies and on prospects of undertaking joint projects in the region.

19. **Mr. Malie** (Lesotho) said that the swift advances in information and communication technology were of particular significance to Lesotho because it was among the African countries with the lowest Internet connectivity. Accordingly, his Government had recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for project assistance under the USAID Leland Initiative for accelerating Internet connectivity. The project addressed, inter alia, policy formulation on miscellaneous Internet issues, e-commerce, integration of government activities and work processes with the Internet and capacity-building.

20. A necessary condition for the realization of the benefits of ICT was an adequate telecommunications infrastructure. As part of the Government's plans to improve those services, the private sector would be invited to participate in the country's State-owned telecommunications company, the Government would relinquish its shares in the only mobile cellular telephone company and provide for a second licence for a cellular company in conjunction with the privatization of the fixed line telephone company. The thrust of the Government's programme in ICT development was to maximize the benefits of the technology for the average citizen. Three areas of activity were important in that regard: education; health; and "e-governance" — the provision of Government services electronically to the public.

21. In the area of education, all students and lecturers at the National University of Lesotho now had full access to the Internet. Funding from the World Bank had made it possible to set up a computer laboratory at the University where most Internet resources were available. Funding from the World Bank had also made it possible to develop an educational management information system for all middle and high schools in the country. He noted also that his Government was keenly interested in the possibilities of telemedicine and in the provision of Web-based information for disease prevention and primary health care. In that

regard, information in connection with the HIV/AIDS pandemic was of particular relevance.

22.   In the area of e-governance, the aim was to bring government services to the general public as effortlessly and quickly as possible. The first step was to improve the Government's own information technology capacity. So far, approximately 100 government offices had been connected. In a month's time the government web site was to be up and running, and there was a project to develop web pages for all the ministries as well.

23.   The Ministry of Public Service had recently installed a human resources management system, which would be made accessible to every ministry over a wide area network. The government computer centre also intended to make the financial information management system available over such a network to district offices of the Ministry of Finance responsible for revenue collection. A project was under way to train all top government officials on Internet operations.

24.   In preparation for the forthcoming general election, there were plans to put several electronic communications systems in place and perhaps satellite-based telephones. Vendors had been asked to propose solutions. It was hoped that the communities would retain some of the communications facilities after the elections.

25.   While a country might conceivably reverse trade liberalization if its experience was negative, the information and communications revolution, the second pillar of globalization, was undeniably not reversible. The movement of capital across borders, the enhanced capacity of transnational corporations to increase their reach worldwide, the phenomenal growth of e-commerce, chiefly in the United States but about to become global, were unstoppable. But the advantages the weaker economies might derive from the process could turn out to be a mirage without international cooperation.

26.   In a country like Lesotho, in which 80 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, bringing technology within reach of the people would require first solving the basic problems of making power and communications lines available to remote areas. The best hope appeared to lie in solar energy and new wireless technologies. Those dreams could not be realized unaided. The international community must

make a compact whereby those better endowed would come to the aid of those less so and enlist the cooperation of government, the private sector, civil society and international organizations.

27.   **Mr. Orlando** (Observer for Uruguay) said that his delegation firmly believed that information technology, properly used, could be a prime tool of development. It could greatly accelerate the process of education and training, create jobs and help to integrate marginal groups into the mainstream of development. Information and communication technologies (ICT) could also contribute to greater transparency in government and greater accountability to citizens.

28.   Uruguay favoured the creation of community information centres in rural and peri-urban zones to serve as education and training centres. Such centres could disseminate knowledge of the new technologies while respecting cultural identities and national development priorities.

29.   That project would not be possible on a global scale unless developing countries and economies in transition could count on investment support and technology transfer from the developed countries and assistance from multilateral lending institutions. In addition to actions by States, the input and cooperation of the private sector in telecommunications hardware and software would be essential. Nothing less than a new concept of international cooperation was required to combat poverty using the tools of information and communication technology. Technology alone could not accomplish the miracle. Countries must make the effort to train their teachers, instructors and professionals. The key to greater social development was education. It was essential to increase digital literacy, while at the same time increasing the local content and linguistic accessibility of the information available electronically.

30.   The views of the Latin American and Caribbean countries regarding the bases for further action were set forth in the recent Declaration of Florianopolis, contained in session document E/2000/74. The region would consider the topic further at the upcoming meeting of the MERCOSUR member and associate member countries to be organized by the Inter-American Development Bank and hosted by the Government of Uruguay in Montevideo and at the Latin American and Caribbean seminar on information and communications technologies to be held at the

invitation of Venezuela in October 2000. Uruguay believed that the time was ripe to formulate a concrete, realistic plan of action to enable the region and its countries to put into effect the goals expressed during the current session.

31. **Mr. Zepeda Bermúdez** (Honduras) said that the knowledge and information revolution the world was now experiencing might surpass in impact, as it certainly surpassed in speed, the Industrial Revolution and the cultural revolution brought about by the Renaissance. Thanks to information technology, problems once considered insoluble were being solved more rapidly than ever before in human history, and disasters once thought inevitable were found to be, if not avoidable, at least capable of mitigation. Had it not been for the advance warning and communications with the populace made possible by new technology, many more lives would have been lost in Honduras when Hurricane Mitch struck in 1998.

32. That experience had only intensified his country's determination to expand its ICT capacity. As early as 1993, the first digital network in Honduras, dubbed HONDUNET, was launched to link up academic institutions, laboratories, research centres, technology-based industries and other national and governmental institutions.

33. Honduras had created links to global e-commerce markets, aviation telecommunications and electronic banking. It had developed ICT applications in government and industry. Teleconferencing had made it possible for universities in the country to link up with universities abroad and offer training seminars and postgraduate programmes in new disciplines.

34. Those considerable technological advances were ultimately valuable only to the extent that they promoted development and reduced poverty. In 1999 Honduras, with support from UNESCO, had launched the first "solar village" in Latin America, followed by a second in May 2000, in which solar power provided access to electricity and communications. Due to the success of the project, a new concept was being developed called "net solar villages", which would use high-speed wireless Internet systems to provide the added benefits of distance education, telemedicine and news links to and from all parts of the globe, as a step towards installation of a wireless telephone system for remote rural areas.

35. In October Honduras would be hosting a conference in conjunction with the Commission of the European Union on applying the technologies of the information society to development in remote communities. At the conference Honduras would recount its experience with net solar villages as an example of how appropriate technologies could be used to close development gaps.

36. His delegation welcomed the Council initiative in dealing with the item and called upon the United Nations, as the only body with universal support, to assist the efforts of developing countries to harness the benefits of globalization and improve the quality of life for all.

37. **Ms. Alibegović** (Croatia) said that information and communications technologies (ICT), properly directed, could empower the disempowered, accelerate economic growth, reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. That vision could become a reality if multilateral organizations, the public and private sectors and civil society cooperated and adopted a collective approach to the use of ICT.

38. Croatia was reorganizing and modernizing its education system by incorporating ICT. ICT subjects were to be introduced in elementary school, and the aim was to equip every secondary school with a connection to the Internet. Currently about 25 per cent of high schools had modern information equipment. Computer use was intensifying in the civil service and Internet connections were gradually proliferating. Statistics for 1999 showed that 5.6 per cent of the population had used the Internet.

39. Over the past 10 years Croatia had developed a fixed digital phone network, partly privatized but still for the most part State-owned. There were two service providers for cellular phones and several Internet providers, although their possibilities were limited by connection to one fixed phone network. The academic and research communities had developed their own network, called CARnet, with a strong communication nucleus within the country but poor connection to other countries. E-commerce was only in the embryonic stage.

40. The Croatian Government had initiated activities aimed at adapting the legislative framework to a more liberal information policy, increasing Internet connectivity and content and using ICT as a catalyst for the long-term development of the country. In the

short term, it was working on amendments to the Telecommunications Act. It had established an Internet Office to deal with technical and administrative matters. ICT was also considered in the development policy document being drafted to cover the next 30 years. Croatia recognized that, in the absence of both national and multilateral action, the digital divide would not be bridged and economic disparity between countries would widen.

41. Recent events had shown that there was much disaffection connected with the perceived one-sided nature of globalization, of which the present differential access to information and knowledge was an example. The ministerial declaration to be adopted at the end of the high-level segment should serve as the first step in bringing ICT within the framework of international cooperation, so that it could be used in the service of development. The United Nations, through the Economic and Social Council, had a vital role to play in that regard.

42. **Mr. Ordzhonikidze** (Russian Federation) said that the task of the international community was to ensure that information technologies served the interests of all mankind. The United Nations should become a global forum for standard-setting in the field and for an open and serious discussion of such issues as cultural diversity, information ethics, privacy and cyber crime. The problem of information security deserved special attention at a multilateral level to prevent the use of ICT for purposes incompatible with international stability and security.

43. Among the valuable contributions to the session documentation, his delegation felt that the contribution of the Economic Commission for Europe (E/2000/72) deserved special attention, and it found many of the conclusions of the report of the Committee for Development Policy (E/2000/33) in line with its own thinking. His delegation shared the view expressed in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2000/52) that the introduction and efficient use of ICT would require considerable efforts to overcome the existing digital divide in terms of institutional and technical infrastructure and training of skilled personnel.

44. Through e-commerce, information technology was rapidly embracing nearly all spheres of material production. Although it held great promise, it should not be allowed to become a "virtual" barrier to trade for those without access to it. Inevitably, the private

sector played the leading role in ICT development, but it was the task of the United Nations to guide its development into a more rational and equitable channel. Only collective effort could ensure the sustainability of the information revolution.

45. All competent United Nations bodies, including the operational funds and programmes, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Commission on Sustainable Development, should address ICT issues, with good coordination to avoid overlapping of efforts. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's proposals to intensify United Nations ICT-related activities and to draw in partners from the private sector and the donor community.

46. Clearly, the new technologies, by themselves, were not capable of overcoming structural lags in particular economies. Promotion of ICT should support rather than replace efforts at technological modernization in the basic economic sectors. Nevertheless, there was a need gradually to increase the share of funds allocated to ICT and related education and training programmes and to step up the ICT component in technical assistance programmes. His delegation believed that the ministerial declaration which would emerge from the high-level segment should define the basic areas of concentration for future international cooperation in ICT and hoped that the topic would receive further attention in the Millennium Assembly, in the work on a new international development strategy and in the review of Agenda 21 in 2002.

47. **Ms. Konate** (Burkina Faso) said that the paradox confronting the Council was that the swifter the development of new technologies that could potentially bring greater wealth to all nations and peoples, the wider the gap seemed to grow between the developed and developing countries. In Africa, in particular, informatics and computers remained a luxury reserved for the privileged few. Despite the power of the new technologies to erase distances and leap across frontiers with dizzying speed, more than half the world's population faced huge barriers to development and was not even aware of the new means of leveraging development potential.

48. These basic problems must be kept firmly in mind. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the growth rate in the least

developed countries, of which Burkina Faso was one, had dropped from 6 per cent in 1995 to 3.8 per cent in 1998, and their terms of trade had worsened. They faced the problems of fluctuations in prices of their commodities and tariff and non-tariff barriers that blocked access of their goods to rich-country markets. They had continued to drag a burden of heavy debt, even while official development assistance had dropped drastically and loans from international financial institutions had slowed. Most serious of all, lack of capacity made it difficult to take advantage of the opportunities that international trade and finance might offer and to adapt to the rapid advance of knowledge and technology.

49. Moreover, the countries of sub-Saharan Africa were poorly equipped in infrastructure to take advantage of information technologies. A few facts about her own country taken from the most recent Human Development Report would serve as illustration: in Burkina Faso in 1998, there were four telephone lines, 0.1 public telephones and 0.02 Internet subscribers per 1,000 inhabitants. The Government had taken some steps to remedy the situation. The communications sector had been liberalized, and as a result two private companies had recently been granted mobile telephony concessions. At the same time, the National Telecommunications Office had made efforts to improve its services, and the number of telephone subscribers had increased substantially. However, those developments were essentially confined to urban areas and to the field of telephone communications. Computer use was still extremely limited.

50. The recommendations of the Secretary-General and the panel of experts on how to harness the potential of information technologies to increase trade, reduce poverty, create jobs, spread knowledge and information more democratically were of great interest. But in the enthusiasm for technology, one must not lose sight of the fact that most of the world's people were concerned with a daily struggle for the means of subsistence, that the percentage of children in school was woefully low, that basic infrastructure remained to be built. Information technologies were not a panacea for all those problems.

51. The task of the United Nations, and especially the Economic and Social Council, was to ensure that the new technologies were adapted to serve as tools usable by developing countries and did not become an ever more sophisticated and refined instrument of

alienation. On a broader scale, they must work to prevent globalization from imposing a homogenized culture resulting in the great impoverishment of the human patrimony.

52. **Mr. Brown** (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP was committed to taking a lead in the United Nations family in promoting ICT applications for development. It already had experience in pioneering digital telecentres and now needed to work with its partners to develop new local, national and global strategies to help mainstream and maximize the impact of those initiatives on providing a better life for the poor.

53. The international and national public sectors had the task of reforming the policy environment to encourage ICT private investment and nurturing a domestic ICT sector providing portals, content and connectivity, while helping to carry the private sector into uncharted markets. He congratulated the Government of Japan for the recent seminar in Tokyo on those important issues.

54. UNDP sought to help developing countries to build capacity to meet the needs of the poor. Its development approach was based on articulate advocacy and sound advice combined with carefully selected pilot programmes underpinned by a range of strategic partnerships.

55. The most important issues for a National Information Policy were connectivity and competition. Competition led to greater investment, decreased prices, rapid user growth and new technology development. Political will, and credible and autonomous regulatory bodies were needed to encourage such competition.

56. Issues of access, cost and reach, which had held back telephone services in the past, were being overcome as countries sought out the least-cost technology in areas from Internet protocol to third generation cellular and satellite telephony.

57. UNDP's next Human Development Report would be devoted to technology, and a new trust fund was planned, with partners such as ITU, to support "e-readiness".

58. Governments also needed to focus on education and entrepreneurship, by spreading literacy and some basic knowledge of information technology across society. As Internet access costs declined and wireless

connectivity offered universal reach, the real obstacles to Internet use were in fact cultural, rather than physical. Cultural barriers, such as the need for local content, needed to be addressed.

59. The revolution had only just begun. UNDP had dramatically improved its knowledge-sharing capability and begun plans to streamline the management of accounts, reporting, procurement and other ICT activities across the entire field of development. It had set up a web site in cooperation with CISCO systems that allowed an individual to select directly the project to support. More radically, the Internet held the prospect of offering financial services directly to the poor, rather than having decisions made by government or an aid agency.

60. Microfinance initiatives that offered everything from crop insurance to small business credit, health and education plans even to very poor customers and "e-governance" initiatives that offered better information and more efficient and accountable services directly from governments broadened the scope for new ICT-based public-private partnerships.

61. Many of those ideas were still experimental, but could be achieved if the international community used the forthcoming summits to set and resource some key targets for the next five years — such as removal of regulatory obstacles to ICT, creating new policy environments, and providing at least one Internet and telephone terminal in every community. A new digital bridge could give millions of people an unprecedented opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty.

62. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) referred to a project begun by women in a rural community in Guyana, which involved selling hand-woven hammocks through a web site. The project had been successful until male community leaders took it over. The project, and potential wealth and connectedness that it could have created, was destroyed by gender dynamics.

63. It was important to ensure that the benefits of ICT were equally available to women and men. Women and girls had to be included in major policy choices and infrastructure development. Provision of micro-credit, education and health services to women created benefits for children, communities and countries. The cost of exclusion was too high.

64. The digital divide threatened to increase inequities between the sexes. The issues of connectivity, capacity-building and content all had gender implications that needed to be taken into account. Gender-equitable strategies of connectivity, for example, would take into account the time constraints that women faced as the main providers of care and nurturing, and their lower levels of literacy. Strategies to increase capacity-building should ensure that women and girls received the training and preparation to become ICT users and producers and to use and shape the associated policy framework. Strategies related to content should address concerns about the predominance of the information flows from North to South — primarily in English — and the danger of ICT serving merely as a vehicle for entertainment.

65. UNIFEM supported the numerous recommendations related to ICTs and gender equality made by the high-level panel of experts, and also many of the general recommendations, such as the establishment of a United Nations ICT task force and a fund. Gender equality advocates should be present in decision-making about those mechanisms.

66. UNIFEM's perspectives on ICTs had emerged from a consultative process that had taken place over the past year with non-governmental organizations, governments and private sector partners. Its calls for gender equality in ICT policies and programmes were echoed by the recommendations that had emerged from other international conferences and organizations calling for: gender analysis of telecommunications policies in every country; data disaggregated by sex, as well as qualitative assessments about use of ICTs; and the placement of women on boards of directors and in the leadership of information technology companies.

67. UNIFEM, with its partners and networks, could offer guidance, expertise and insights that would ensure a policy framework, as well as a dynamic group of users, that could reap the benefits of diverse perspectives and needs. There were countless examples of the efforts and learning of women and men who were working for an inclusive, socially responsible approach to ICTs for development. It was hoped that the United Nations would bring that collective expertise to bear on future work.

68. UNIFEM was an innovative and catalytic women's fund of the United Nations system. It had

harnessed the power of ICTs to put the pandemic of violence against women on the global agenda and to stimulate coordinated action between the United Nations system, governments and civil society. Strategies to end gender-based violence had been worked out within the United Nations International Children's Fund, UNDP and countless other organizations and governments.

69. A Memorandum of Understanding had been initiated with the International Telecommunications Union and UNDP regarding action on ICTs for development. UNDP had also established a trust fund to support "e-readiness" at the country level; if it was committed to "e-quality", the fund would call on UNIFEM's expertise, field networks and partners to ensure that its benefits and policies applied equally to women and men.

70. Proposals to spread the benefits of ICTs equitably needed to be bold and daring. Recommendations from the present meeting should include: the establishment of a United Nations task force, the launching of 30,000 technical volunteers, and the deployment of more than a billion dollars to increase connectivity and participation in the new information age. In those and other follow-up actions, it was essential that 100 per cent of initiatives reflect a commitment to gender mainstreaming. Up to 50 per cent of funds and programme activities should be allocated specifically to women and girls, and future deliberations should incorporate their perspectives and experiences. UNIFEM offered its full support and cooperation to creating an environment in which ICTs acted as a vehicle to support equality and connections between countries, ethnic groups, and men and women.

71. *Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

72. **Mr. Sun Joun-Yung** (Republic of Korea) said that none could dispute that ICT contributed to economic growth and poverty alleviation, while facilitating the division of labour and enhancing competitiveness. At the same time, there were growing concerns about the diverging capabilities to tap the benefits of ICT. The information poverty in most developing countries would be further aggravated unless proper and concerted action was taken at both the national and international levels.

73. At the national level, new and bold policies should be adopted for developing human resources and

enhancing institutional capacity. Measures should also be taken to attract domestic and foreign investment and to promote infrastructure development and local contents. Democracy and a market-based economy, underpinned by transparency, accountability and good governance, provided the best environment for ICT to thrive.

74. At the international level, fundamental changes should be made to squarely address the digital divide problem through partnerships between the public and private sectors. Considering the growing importance of the private sector's role in the era of globalization, it was vital to promote a digital compact between private sector entities and the United Nations. Furthermore, in view of the high costs involved in enhancing connectivity and capacity in developing countries, innovative ways and means must be explored to promote more strategic approaches in the area of overseas development assistance, South-North, and South-South cooperation.

75. The United Nations system should strive for the promotion of greater coherence and consistency in its ICT-related activities. The relationship of ICT development preserving cultural diversity, as well as production and consumption patterns, needed to be examined. The implications of ICT for ethics, governance and intellectual property rights deserved thorough investigation, taking into account the relevant regulations and the rapid speed of technological development. ICT-related policies should maximize the benefits arising from development of other technologies such as bio-technologies in the context of development.

76. The recommendations of the ACC deserved favourable consideration. He supported the Secretary-General's proposal to establish UNITeS to promote better and cost-effective access to ICT.

77. His country was one of the fastest-growing ICT markets in the world. In 1999 alone, the growth rate of investment in ICT-related industries was 61 per cent. With an ambitious project, "Cyber Korea 21" the Republic of Korea had invested in the expansion of communication networks, the strengthening of human and institutional capacities, and the promotion of ICT-related industry.

78. The Republic of Korea was ready to share its experience with developing countries. During the past decade, it had provided training in ICT for around 500

technicians from developing countries. Expansion of hubs at community and school levels was a cost-effective way for more people in developing countries to gain access to ICT. His country had provided financial and technical assistance for the establishment of the Information Technology Centre for Africa within the framework of the Economic Commission for Africa.

79. The Council had great potential for promoting synergies and coherence in the United Nations system as a whole. The high-level segment should provide an important platform for the promotion of ICT, in particular for developing countries.

80. **Mr. Shobokshi** (Saudi Arabia) fully supported the principles of a multinational trade system within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), but noted that the developing countries did not have a share in the privileges that were implied in the multilateral trade system. The current agreements of the Uruguay Round had not been fully implemented, and despite the fact that WTO offered the world a system based on the rule of law and the principle of transparency, there was no text stipulating the conditions and rules for joining it. Universality of WTO would strengthen the multilateral trade system, and proper assistance should be offered to developing countries. New members should not have more obligations than those already members, and there should be some flexibility to allow for countries' development needs.

81. He called on the developed countries to give developing countries an effective share in decision-making, and to discontinue their protectionist trade policies. Acceptable mechanisms were needed to facilitate the transfer of expensive technologies to the developing world on terms acceptable to both parties.

82. The gap between the rich and developing countries was widening every year, especially in education and technology. The negotiations that sought to make economic relations more equitable had not succeeded. Countries of the North were still creating obstacles to products from developing countries. Despite those barriers, the GCC countries were trying to penetrate the markets of developed countries to sell their petro-chemical products.

83. Information technology was vital to the fight against poverty, and to achieving economic development and social stability. In order to support

the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation, Saudi Arabia had increased its voluntary contributions and had sent out invitations offering to host the first Islamic conference for ministers of science, higher education and research in October 2000. His country would also host an international conference on the relation between the transfer of technology and information that would formulate suggestions to enable developing countries to catch up with the accelerating pace of economic information and benefit from it.

84. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that the ICT revolution was leading more and more to a knowledge and information-based economy. ICTs had infinite possibilities for advancing the development process. They could be applied in areas as diverse as trade and electronic trade, finance, management, administration, distance learning, medicine, agriculture and food security, and environmental monitoring and observation.

85. ICTs were powerful forces in the globalization process. The Internet and other options based on network culture were increasing the interdependence of individuals, nations, cultures and economies.

86. The main challenge for Algeria would be to concentrate on how to place ICTs at the service of development and ensure that they were of benefit to all of humanity, given that the digital revolution was taking place against a background of glaring inequalities between the countries of the North and the South.

87. The majority of countries in the South were far behind in the technology area. One of the merits of the present high-level segment was the consensus it was producing on the urgency of acting to reduce that digital divide by helping the countries of the South to integrate ICTs in their development process.

88. ICTs were certainly no panacea for the problems of the South, but they were proving vital to economic, social and cultural life. They could also facilitate integration of those countries in the world economy, but the necessary preconditions for their use were: human and institutional capacity; infrastructure for connectivity; and local content.

89. Developing countries, particularly in Africa, faced many problems relating to finance for development. There was a great need for investment in

education and literacy, institutional capacity and technological acquisition.

90.   In addition to limited internal resources, a heavy burden of foreign debt, a significant deterioration in exchange rates, scant participation in international trade and a dwindling of export income, a decline in development assistance and very limited direct foreign investment, the countries of the South were facing the serious challenges reflected in the wide-spread poverty of their populations.

91.   A vast reform programme was under way in Algeria with the assistance of the World Bank in order to establish an environment that would improve access to affordable and efficient communications services by opening the sector to competition and participation of the private sector.

92.   Algeria supported the recommendation by the Secretary-General, in his report, that "the international community and the United Nations system have an obligation to assist developing countries and countries in transition to fully and beneficially integrate into the networked knowledge-based global economy".

93.   His country also shared the Secretary-General's view that "This is a particularly propitious time for launching a major global effort based on global ICT partnerships for achieving universal basic access to ICT services within a time-bound framework of perhaps five years". It fully supported the recommendation to establish a task force, and the regional Commissions, particularly in the case of Africa, should participate in that process.

94.   In many ways, ICTs were a new pressure on developing countries. The United Nations agencies had a crucial role to play in supporting the efforts of developing countries in their search for the most economical and judicious policies. Universal access to ICTs was a moral necessity as well as a useful investment that would enable all countries to participate in the new knowledge-based world economy.

95.   If there was no clear strategy and plan of action, he hoped that the present Council debate would help to strengthen the consensus on the urgency of providing support for the developing world so that it could make its contribution to the new age.

96.   **Mr. Galuska** (Czech Republic) said that in May 1999 his Government had approved a State Information

Policy setting out the basic goals to be achieved through the application of information technology to public administration and commerce. The Policy, which had incorporated several principles set out in a European Union initiative on the information society, had been designed to foster increased transparency, security and trust in the economic and political spheres.

97.   The Czech Republic had already reaped a number of benefits in business, environmental protection, protection of cultural heritage and Internet accessibility, and it expected to proceed to full liberalization of the telecommunication market in the year 2001. Active State support for the creation of an information society had been pledged through investment in distance learning and public-private partnership, with specific targets for universal access.

98.   The Government had implemented several fiscal and infrastructure projects, and had formulated new legislation on electronic signatures, personal data protection, public administration information systems and registers.

99.   **Mr. Faaland** (Chairman of the Committee for Development Policy) said that members of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) had recently deliberated on the role of information technology (ICT) in development and globalization. He asserted that the validity of concerns raised in the CDP report, such as the impact of ICT on the volume and pattern of employment, did not entail restrictions on economic growth in developing countries or delay their entry or participation in the global economy and the ICT revolution itself. There was, however, wisdom in conscious precautionary policies and provision of new and additional financial resources to finance compensatory action. The realization of ICT potential depended on the installation of a robust telecommunications network and also effective access to financial resources for investment and growth.

100. The CDP had also acknowledged that the primary responsibility for progress rested with Governments whose domestic strategies should be based on broad and effective partnerships. In tandem with the international community, Governments faced the challenge of finding ways and means to facilitate the realization of growth potentials. Developing countries should receive assistance through action at the international level: the United Nations was well placed to assist with policy implementation and resource flows

at all levels. It was a challenge for analysts and experts to devise realistic alternatives and options for effective ICT international policies and transfers. Likewise, it was a challenge for Governments and international bodies to make the choices and take the action necessary to create and sustain a prosperous, fair and sustainable world economy. The advent and development of information technologies would not per se bring that about.

101. **The President** suspended the general debate and invited members of the private sector to address the Economic and Social Council.

102. **Mr. Kemna** (Chief Executive Officer of SAP), **Mr. Pitroda** (President and Chief Executive Officer of World Tel), **Mr. Gage** (Chief Scientist of Sun Microsystems) and **Mr. Cerf** (Senior Vice-President of World Com.) briefly described their companies' activities and commented on the anticipated impact of the latest technological innovations on development.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.