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Provisional summary record of the 16th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 7 July 2000, at 4 p.m.

President:	Mr. Wibisono	(Indonesia)
later:	Mr. Sotirov (Vice-President)	(Bulgaria)
later:	Mr. Niehaus (Vice-President)	(Costa Rica)
later:	Mr. Wibisono (President)	(Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

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

1. **Ms. Cattaui** (Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)) said that ICC had members in 130 countries, most of which were emerging or traditional economies, or developing or least developed countries. ICC and its members were ready to play an active role in the mechanisms which might emerge from the Council's current session. In the new knowledge-based economy, it was vital for Governments, international organizations, businesses and private citizens to acknowledge the need to cooperate on a practical basis. In the telecommunications area, ICC worked with the International Telecommunication Union, which was a centre of expertise in certain critical areas of public policy, such as determining how to open telecommunication markets to competition and reducing the costs of communications for small businesses. In the regulatory area, businesses had long experience of working with Governments and international organizations on issues of internal competition in telecommunications. In developing economies, however, the scale of investment required to upgrade the telecommunications infrastructure was massive. Because most of that investment would have to come from the private sector, steps must be taken to create an appropriate climate in the developing countries for investment by both domestic and international capital.

2. As for the human factor, the new information society would be created not by policy makers but by creative and ambitious individuals, often young people, who should be encouraged by Governments to set up their own businesses. The Internet was a frictionless market and a means whereby Governments could focus on the untapped potential within their own countries. The information-based economy offered opportunities both for education and for lifelong learning, provided that employees, managers and the self-employed could upgrade or acquire the necessary skills. The United Nations should therefore support retraining programmes for that purpose in developing countries. The business world, in turn, was committed to working with Governments to promote technical training and lifelong learning for the whole of society.

3. Small and medium-sized companies were the backbone of economic growth. ICC encouraged greater cooperation between them and larger corporations, especially in providing access to electronic networks for marketing purposes. The World Chambers Network, in which the Chamber of the Group of 77 was a partner, was an example of such cooperation. The role of Governments should be to provide small and medium-sized companies with information and education relevant to market entry opportunities. It was important to secure an environment conducive to private sector investment in information technologies, and to promote access to capital for small and medium-sized enterprises. Young people and small and medium-sized companies should be able to take advantage of cyberspace within a framework of rules. Governments should be urged to enact sound competition legislation, to prosecute criminals more effectively and to protect physical and intellectual property. ICC members in developing countries were actively engaged in the process of rule-making, and ICC hoped for greater cooperation in that area from small and medium-sized businesses.

4. **Mr. Hamutenya** (Observer for Namibia) said that there was now a clear global consensus that ICT was making a critical contribution to economic and social development in all countries. In most developing countries, and especially in Africa, however, the benefits of the ICT revolution were still very limited. Africa's share of the business transactions conducted on the Internet — estimated at US$ 45 billion in 1998 — was less than one per cent. He welcomed the Secretary-General's appeal for additional international support to the developing countries in their efforts to overcome the digital divide.

5. Since gaining independence in 1990, Namibia had invested considerable resources in improving and expanding the physical and social infrastructure on which ICT depended. It had developed infrastructure for transport, energy supply and telecommunications and had invested heavily in education and health, in which it now ranked among the highest-spending African nations. In 1993, Windhoek had been one of only a few African cities with access to the Internet. In 1998, the Government had established an Internet/Intranet network, whereby government departments and State agencies could link up with the

outside world and with the private sector and civil society. A close partnership was now evolving between the Government, and the private sector, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and a strategy for exchanging information and transferring knowledge was being formulated. The Government's aim in establishing online services through the network was to facilitate communication by citizens with all levels of government. The public had access to new online services and could register companies, file income tax returns and apply for identity documents electronically. However, there was still a need for rapid development of ICT skills and capacities in order for Namibia to exploit the potential of ICT to the full. In that connection, it hoped to benefit from the initiative proposed in the Secretary-General's report (A/55/75-E/2000/55).

6. *Mr. Sotirov (Bulgaria), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

7. **Mr. Jordan Pando** (Bolivia) said that the defining characteristics of the twenty-first century would be science and technology and information technologies. New approaches needed to be taken to the international economy which would promote economic and social development and not just globalization. With the new tools of ICT, the United Nations could become a source of knowledge and education for all with which to gradually overcome the negative effects of globalization and the legacy of inequality, injustice, poverty and discrimination.

8. Strategies and policies must be devised to ensure that information technologies resolved differences instead of exacerbating them. The developed countries accounted for 96 per cent of technology production, a dominance achieved through education, knowledge, research and financial resources, assets which could be used either to narrow the gap between developed and developing countries or to widen it, depending on how information technologies were used and for what purpose. If the new technologies were confined to elites with access to markets, the digital divide would inevitably increase. The universal aim must be to eradicate poverty and to bring about integration, not exclusion. The economic policies practised thus far had resulted in development but also in discrimination, injustice and poverty, because the market alone could not solve every problem. Even State-run economies had failed to meet social needs, and many developed countries protected their export markets while proclaiming policies of market liberalization. The Washington Consensus on free-market policies had been superseded by the Santiago Consensus, which looked at the limitations of the market and made recommendations for creating partnerships between the private sector and the public and non-governmental sectors. The Council should promote such models, which were aimed at fostering inclusion.

9. The United Nations could do much more to stimulate development. While peacekeeping expenditures had more than trebled in one year, financing for development was almost nil and international cooperation for development was being carried out only by the Nordic countries. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had become a donation administering agency, rather than a development financing agency, and the poorest and smallest countries were suffering as a result. There was no mention of UNDP, or development financing, in the Secretary-General's report entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" (A/54/2000). The pillars of the United Nations were peace, security and development; if there was no financing for development, it should be asked where the United Nations was heading. Besides, Member States, specially poor countries, paid a high price for peacekeeping operations which did not always serve their interests or comply with the Charter of the United Nations.

10. There was a global consensus that information technologies should be used to promote development. There was also agreement on the need for: strategic alliances between the private and public sectors, universities and international organizations; policies and plans for science and technology at the institutional, national and regional level; the creation of centres of excellence at the national, subregional and regional level; leadership training and investment in education, research and development; the creation of an environment favourable to free competition; transparency and accountability; the creation of programme content which respected traditions and cultures; and the creation or improvement of IT infrastructure in order to provide universal access while protecting privacy and security. It should be borne in mind that 50 per cent of information technology changed every 10 years, the volume of information doubled every five years and the telecommunications bandwidth doubled every nine

months. Eighty per cent of electronic commerce took place in the developed countries, while only three per cent of the population of Latin America was connected to the Internet. The average cost of connectivity was three to nine times higher in developing countries than in industrialized countries. Moreover, 90 per cent of Internet content was in English.

11. The Declaration of Florianopolis adopted recently by the Latin American and Caribbean countries should be supported as a basis for future action, at both the national and the regional level and should be implemented through the Inter-American Development Bank. The Asian and African Development Banks should likewise be responsible for installing information technology networks and infrastructure in their respective regions. Policies should be adopted for providing connectivity to the majority of the population and not just to the 15 per cent who controlled the resources. Attention must also be paid to content and to regulatory frameworks which would protect intellectual property. The future of countries depended on the incorporation of information technology into development programmes.

12. **Ms. Sadik** (Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that improved information flows were crucial for the development mission of the United Nations. The new technologies could equip individuals and societies to respond to changing circumstances. A wave of innovations in the exchange of knowledge and information had resulted from the simple low-cost operation of technologies such as cellular phones and personal computers, combined with broad access to the Internet. For instance, women in Bangladesh were using cellular phones to find the best market for their produce; private companies and non-governmental organizations in India were setting up Internet kiosks in villages; and Internet cafés could be found in the remotest regions. Distance learning, web sites, radio services on the Internet and information exchanges among groups of like-minded people were examples of the use of new technologies in creative ways. The United Nations system must grasp the immense possibilities offered by ICT for development. If misused, however, those technologies could deepen the divides which already existed or be used to promote violence, racism and pornography. The use of ICT must be based on universal values and means must be found of making ICT available to all, enhancing what was strong and valuable in cultures and challenging aspects that were regressive.

13. UNFPA had worked closely with other parts of the United Nations system to use knowledge-based applications of ICT. For example, it had supported the electronic processing and analysis of demographic data; it had introduced electronic management and monitoring of family planning methods and contraceptive prevalence for the health systems of developing countries; and it had developed software with the United Nations Statistics Division for visual mapping of the coverage of social services. It had used its web site to provide information for the five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development.

14. As for the use of ICT in developing countries, in Uganda, traditional birth attendants used cellular phones to seek advice and refer emergencies; women and young people in the Philippines and Indonesia used cellular phones and e-mail to obtain information on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy; and in Senegal, cybercafés in schools were used for family life education.

15. Looking to the future, UNFPA was developing a distance-learning project to train national staff and partners in population programming. Reproductive health-care providers could use ICT to upgrade their skills, and rural communities could obtain Internet access and information. Electronic conferences and theme groups, could be organized to strengthen networks among civil society organizations, and to empower communities and individuals to join in public policy debates and lobby for reform. UNFPA would continue to participate in inter-agency discussions on ICT policy, strategies and programmes. It was keen to address the digital divide at the highest level and also to ensure greater parity for women and girls in access to ICT.

16. **Mr. Fonseca** (Brazil) said that although the new revolution, in information technologies had great potential for improving the lot of both individuals and countries, it might further widen existing gaps within societies and between countries. Governments had become aware that the task of harnessing information technologies in the service of development could not be left to the free play of market forces and that international cooperation had an important role to play in that regard.

17. On 20 and 21 June 2000, in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Brazil had hosted a regional meeting on information technology for development. The meeting had adopted the Declaration of Florianopolis, outlining a course of action to be followed by participating countries and inviting international cooperation in support thereof. He welcomed the recent announcement that the Inter-American Development Bank planned to use the Declaration as a basis for its activities in support of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

18. Since 1988, his Government had been working to promote use of the Internet and, with 300,000 hosts, Brazil currently ranked thirteenth worldwide. However, it was still far from able to meet the needs of all potential users. The Ministry of Science and Technology had recently launched an Information Society Programme, the purpose of which was to expand economic activity through intensive use of information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly electronic commerce, and to extend Internet access to all segments of the population. Internet applications, including online income tax declarations, issuance of personal documents and election to public office, had led to significant gains in transparency, reliability, speed and social integration.

19. However, connectivity must be supplemented by investing in human resources and focusing on the development of local content in order to ensure wider access and preserve cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. That process would require national efforts supported by the international community; possibilities for multilateral cooperation should be investigated and North-South exchanges intensified. In that regard, his Government had recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Internet 2 project in the United States of America.

20. South-South cooperation could also play an important role. Brazil was involved in cooperation programmes with a number of developing countries, with a special focus on the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), and favoured an approach that focused on partnerships among Governments, the private sector and the scientific and technological community.

21. The United Nations had a unique role to play in promoting dialogue and cooperation in order to create conditions for the dissemination of information technologies and for their integration into development strategies. The Council should participate actively in that process, taking advantage of existing mechanisms, and ensure that the relevant strategies were adequately reflected in the operational activities of the United Nations system and that developing countries became product and service providers in the new economy in order to bridge the digital divide and empower individuals.

22. **Mr. Stuart** (Observer for Australia) said that greater opportunities to compete globally were accompanied by the need to be globally competitive. What was needed was not new trade rules and approaches, but the removal of impediments to access and a greater capacity to take advantage of opportunities. The worldwide spread of the Internet was influenced by the pace of technological development and by government policies, while the private sector must be able to respond to the opportunities and challenges offered by electronic commerce.

23. The international community must strike a balance between unfettered markets and the need for a few ground rules. Efforts to create a non-restrictive international trading environment needed to be made at the national, regional and international level by providing more open, accessible telecommunications regimes and ensuring security of online transactions, privacy and protection of intellectual property. The rules for electronic commerce must be clear, fair and firmly embedded in the principles underpinning the multilateral trading system, and the temptation to introduce unduly prescriptive or intrusive regulations must be resisted.

24. Over-regulation and the maintenance of telecommunication monopolies were raising the price of entry to the global marketplace for those who could least afford it. The international community should liberalize that sector in order to promote technology transfer, reduce costs and achieve the goal of universal access. Current charging arrangements for use of the Internet infrastructure subsidized some carriers and customers at the expense of most others. The telecommunications ministers of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum had recently endorsed a groundbreaking set of principles on international charging arrangements for Internet services which made it clear that Governments need not intervene in private charging arrangements and

should promote competition where there were dominant players or de facto monopolies. Commercially negotiated arrangements should reflect the contribution of each network to the communication, the use by each party of interconnected network resources and the end-to-end costs of international transport link capacity. States should also implement and enhance the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Declaration on Trade in Information Technology Products.

25. Electronic-commerce increased the demand for skilled, adaptable workers and gave organizations greater flexibility in the use of individuals, both locally and overseas. His Government had provided considerable assistance to developing countries in strengthening their information technology systems and skills base, including support for a US$ 2.5 million health information systems project in Samoa, and likewise provided assistance in the field of basic and technical education. ICT advances could also provide considerable educational opportunities through cost savings and increased availability of information, thereby overcoming the disadvantages of isolation in small island States and other developing countries.

26. National strategies were urgently needed to take advantage of the new opportunities. Australia had developed an online trade strategy, *Putting Australia on the New Silk Road*, and had made a study of the economic impact of e-commerce on key industry sectors. Countries which were developing their own strategies had an opportunity to avoid repeating the mistakes made by others. Developed countries should therefore share their experience in promoting and establishing ICT sectors.

27. **Ms. Markham** (Canada) said that, as many speakers had noted, ICT was not an immediate panacea for development problems. In order to make a difference, it must be an integral part of a national development strategy involving efforts to eliminate the gender gap in education, secure basic education for all and create an enabling environment for the effective deployment of ICT which paid due attention to the rights of freedom of expression and association and the principle of equal access. Developing economies and economies in transition should benefit from the experience and often costly errors of more developed countries.

28. With a relatively small population and the second largest land mass in the world, Canada had long been dependent on modern communication technology and currently had one of the world's most advanced and affordable telecommunication systems. Its national strategy sought to make the latest technology available to individuals, schools, libraries, businesses, rural and aboriginal communities, public institutions and all levels of government. Through its development cooperation programmes and in its overall dealings with other Governments and international organizations, her Government sought actively to share its experience with partners beyond Canada's borders. It therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's call for more effective engagement of the United Nations system with other multilateral agencies, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the decision to establish a United Nations Information Technology Service (UNITeS) and an ICT task force that would operate under the leadership of the Secretary-General but outside the normal framework of United Nations structures.

29. **Mr. Sharma** (India) noted that on 21 and 22 June 2000, his Government had hosted a Regional Round Table on Information Technology and Development in New Delhi, the final report of which was contained in document E/2000/73. Information technology provided a gateway to economic advancement, particularly in the service industry and the social sector. In order to ensure that the benefits of an IT-based knowledge economy reached the people of India, his Government had taken steps to promote the growth of India's IT industry and to make sure that the benefits of that technology were felt by ordinary people, even in the remotest parts of the country. To that end, it had launched a national campaign, "Operation Knowledge", which focused on making IT-based education available at all levels, and had established a Working Group on Information Technology for the Masses to formulate a set of policies for implementation by the Government and the private sector.

30. For India, information technology represented an opportunity to overcome historical disabilities and disempowerment and to compress the time required to reach the goal of comprehensive development. Its electronics industry had achieved a 25 per cent growth in production and a 40 per cent growth in exports annually in the period 1994 to 1998; software exports

had recorded a 60 per cent annual growth rate over the past five years; and the market capitalization of listed IT companies was over than US$ 60 billion. However, much remained to be done if the country's development goals were to be met.

31. While the digital revolution was fundamentally market-driven, it was important to find the right balance between self-regulation by the industry and regulation by the Government. The revolution must be harnessed in such a way as to take the social dimension into account. Moreover, the United Nations must rethink ways of facilitating the transfer of technology and knowledge, making sure that such knowledge was meaningful and usable for developing countries, something which was not always the case. Action must also be taken to combat the use of information technology for terrorism, money laundering, drug trafficking and cyber-crime, including pornography and fraud.

32. His Government had made information technology a major aspect of its South-South cooperation and supported the holding of a series of semi-annual lectures by visionary and outstanding private sector, governmental and civil society leaders, as well as the decision to establish a United Nations Information Technology Service (UNITeS)

33. *Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

34. **Mr. Mutaboba** (Rwanda) said that Africa had taken the right decision in embarking on the use of ICT as a short-, medium- and long-term investment plan; the results obtained in such a short time in Mali, Rwanda and elsewhere were cause for optimism.

35. In December 1998, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) had organized a three-day seminar on ICT in Kigali for senior officials of the Rwandan Government. In August 1999, an ECA-sponsored consultant study on ICT had been carried out; his Government had endorsed the resulting recommendations and, in implementation thereof, had established the National Information Technology Commission (NITC) and the Rwanda Information Technology Authority. The Rwanda Policy on Information and Communication Technology had been approved in May 2000. NITC was currently preparing a plan of action for the period 2000 to 2005 and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning had been instructed to facilitate the Commission's work and to establish a budget for its activities by no later than October 2000. He thanked the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States of America for donating two very small aperture terminals (VSATs) to Rwandan universities.

36. Both developed and developing countries needed to break with traditional ways of thinking and to use ICT as an instrument for good governance, dialogue, peace and unhindered development and as a handy tool to which every citizen had a right. For example, libraries could be replaced by ICT-based community centres in rural areas; the new global village should be inhabited by people with the ability to know each other.

37. Computers would mean little to the illiterate peasants of Africa and other developing countries, however, unless they had access to basic utilities such as electricity. While developed countries promoted conventional power sources, the developing world should tap alternative sources such as solar energy. However, it needed the technology to do so, and that must come from the developed countries. He recognized that the West had little to gain financially by supplying a product that would need no repair or maintenance for years to come, but it would win a trust that could form a basis for future partnership, interdependence and international cooperation for development.

38. **Mr. Mwamba Kapanga** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that access to ICT tools such as the Internet could open up not only economic opportunities, but also opportunities for learning, telemedicine, promoting the role of civil society and strengthening democratic institutions. Each country's progress depended on both its access to technology and its endogenous capacity to take advantage of technology. He called upon the international community, and particularly the United Nations, to help build the capacities of developing countries and to give them access to state-of-the-art technologies on preferential and concessional terms.

39. Within the United Nations system, the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions had a crucial role to play in formulating recommendations and guiding principles on science and technology and in putting forward policy and operational recommendations on how to implement the commitments made at major United Nations conferences with regard to the developing countries'

access to technology and the transfer of technology. The Council should be strengthened to better enable it to carry out its functions in the field of science and technology for development.

40. He welcomed the decision to involve the private sector in the high-level segment of the current session. The efforts of individual countries would benefit from support in the technology area, particularly from the private sector and multilateral financial institutions and through foreign investment flows and the transfer or exchange of technology between developed- and developing-country enterprises. Bilateral action was also needed to enable developing countries to free up financial resources for the acquisition and use of new technologies to spur economic growth and social development. Such support could be provided through the adoption of measures for the reduction and cancellation of a portion of bilateral debt, commercial and multilateral debt relief, debt-for-equity swaps or the payment of debt in local currency.

41. He was concerned about the inadequacy of resources for science and technology for development and the lack of political will in that regard on the part of developed countries, whose control over the export of dual-use and other sensitive technologies should not prevent developing countries from gaining access to technology for peaceful uses. He was also concerned about the panoply of measures that hindered, for political and other reasons, the transfer of technology to developing countries.

42. Technological development was of questionable value in countries where even the use of a computer was made problematic by constant power outages caused by lack of fuel. That was the case of countries subject to coercive measures, which could take the form of undeclared embargoes or aggression condoned by the international community. For nearly two years, his Government had drawn the international community's attention to the damaging effects of the armed aggression perpetrated by Burundi, Uganda and Rwanda. Those effects included the impoverishment of all social sectors and the destruction, dismantling and illegal transfer of economic, environmental and industrial structures.

43. He called upon the international community to support his country's efforts towards peace, which was a prerequisite for economic recovery and national reconstruction. The country could then devote its resources to the development of technology for future generations. He also called upon the international community to help his country resume its place in the comity of nations and become integrated into the world economy. To do so, it must stop the vicious circle of violence and seek to eradicate poverty by defining sound macroeconomic policies. By narrowing the digital divide, ICT could help his country overcome the developmental setbacks it had suffered as a result of the armed aggression. The success of international efforts in the field of ICT was crucial for the welfare of present and future generations.

44. **Mr. Meléndez Barahona** (Observer for El Salvador) said that ICT had become the primary tool for strengthening and broadening the ongoing globalization process. Because the new industrial revolution begun by the development of ICT had spread throughout the world in a relatively short period of time, it had rapidly widened the gap between developed and developing countries and had highlighted the structural problems of developing countries, especially those related to extreme poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth.

45. The theme of the Economic and Social Council's current high-level segment provided an opportunity to reflect on the opportunities and challenges presented by the transformation of the international trading system, the increased efficiency of economic activities, economic growth and the expansion of trade, as well as the risks deriving from national economies' vulnerability to external shocks, capital flows and financial speculation, which had been facilitated by the development of ICT. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation to promote and expand the benefits of the ICT revolution should help developing countries correct ICT-related problems, such as: lack of access to education on the use of ICT, particularly the Internet; lack of access to technical and commercial information on the global development of the information economy; the high cost and insufficient geographical coverage of new communications technologies such as the integrated services digital network (ISDN); and insufficient political commitment to and public investment in information technologies in the fields of health, education and science. Efforts should continue at the national, regional and international level to promote the development of ICT and its linkage to national development plans and policies.

46. He reiterated his delegation's support for the recently adopted Declaration of Florianopolis, which stressed the need for government programmes to promote the spread of ICT access and development. The United Nations, in accordance with its Charter obligation to promote the progress of nations, should support the establishment of basic systems in developing countries to enable them to begin the process of integration into the digital age of the twenty-first century.

47. **Mr. Mbayu** (Cameroon) said that the spectacular development of ICT, which was the main catalyst for globalization, presented enormous, although not insurmountable, challenges to the African countries. The existing technological infrastructure in Africa was concentrated in urban areas, whereas 80 per cent of the continent's growing population, an increasing proportion of which consisted of young people, lived in rural areas with no basic technological infrastructure. The cost of Internet connectivity and of installing telephone lines hampered the development of Africa's communication network, particularly in rural areas.

48. A recent study had concluded that Africa could witness phenomenal growth in its telecommunications in the next 10 years and that Internet use could become as prevalent in Africa as in Asia and Latin America. Demand for ICT was on the rise in Cameroon. However, the installation of a modern, digital, cheap and high-performance telecommunication infrastructure throughout the country, would require the investment of sums far larger than the State could afford. Thus, in addition to network privatization, alternative means of mobilizing and collaborating with potential investors should be explored with a view to reducing the cost of communications and achieving better distribution of technology's benefits nationwide. Otherwise, ICT could perpetuate social inequalities, particularly between urban and rural populations.

49. Cameroon was seeking solutions appropriate to its socio-economic situation, while drawing upon models implemented elsewhere. To ensure that ICT had a positive impact on development, the priority needs of users and the best means of involving populations must be identified. Accordingly, the Government was preparing a plan for the development of national infrastructure for accessing ICT. It was imperative to invest in ICT if Africa was to benefit from globalization and effectively combat poverty and illiteracy. More than ever before, Africa needed a close partnership with all major actors in that field in order to promote the advent of the information society on the continent.

50. **Ms. Capeling-Alakija** (United Nations Volunteers (UNV)) said that volunteering made important economic and social contributions by adding significantly to gross domestic product (GDP) and building bonds of reciprocity and trust among citizens. Although UNV already had an online volunteering programme, it had felt that a major ICT volunteering programme led by the United Nations was needed, in view of the digital divide and the fact that many people in both developed and developing countries were willing to help build human capacity to make practical use of ICT. Accordingly, the United Nations Information Technology Service (UNITeS) had been established to harness the knowledge of thousands of volunteers for the application of ICT to human development.

51. UNITeS would be global, open and diverse and would focus on key areas of human development such as education, health, employment, governance, environment and humanitarian aid. It would be demand-driven and would respond to requests from the Governments, private sectors or civil societies of developing countries. The participating volunteers would come from both the North and the South; South-to-South volunteer placement would be encouraged, as would the participation of qualified volunteers in their own countries. Volunteers contributing through the Internet would also be involved. UNITeS would operate on the basis of partnership among all the members of a geographically balanced coalition that would be established to implement the programme. UNITeS would use its volunteers' knowledge to find practical applications of ICT for human development. It was hoped that UNITeS would be a catalyst for similar initiatives to strengthen the human capacity needed to narrow the digital divide.

52. Since the Secretary-General's announcement of the initiative in his Millennium Report (A/54/2000), UNV had been working closely with the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships and other key collaborators. A UNITeS web site had already been launched (www.unites.org) to seek interested volunteers. In early June, an informal working group of ICT experts had formulated a series of recommendations and conclusions to underpin the programme's further development.

53. The goals of the International Year of Volunteers, to be observed in 2001, were the promotion, facilitation, networking and recognition of volunteers and volunteer contributions. Those goals also applied to UNITeS. Volunteering would be one component of a comprehensive response to the challenge of ensuring access to information and communication services for all. However, UNITeS would need the support and guidance of a wide variety of actors and stakeholders, including Governments.

54. **Ms. Weill-Hallé** (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) said that there was a digital divide not only between the rich and the poor and between developed and developing countries, but also between rural and urban communities. Over 70 per cent of the people living in extreme poverty in the world lived in rural areas. While the rural poor had considerable traditional knowledge concerning the conditions in which they lived and worked, that knowledge had remained fragmented and had not been enhanced through exchanges of experience or systematic efforts to upgrade it. Moreover, insufficient access to market information limited the rural poor's ability to sell their products and to purchase the inputs they needed.

55. ICT could help the rural poor work their way out of poverty by giving them access both to the knowledge and experience of comparable communities and to external knowledge and innovations in ways that enabled them to choose for themselves the knowledge most relevant to their needs. Rural workers needed ICT as much as their urban counterparts, but their needs were not the same, nor were the needs of different rural communities identical. Therefore, ICT must be supplied to rural areas according to the needs identified by the rural poor themselves. Increases in aggregate levels of connectivity alone would not correct rural-urban disparities in access to ICT. In addition, Governments must help rural communities make full use of ICT by providing them with appropriate training, including literacy training. Targeted and locally appropriate actions were also needed to ensure women's access to the benefits of ICT.

56. Efforts in that area should begin with making the rural poor aware of the technology available to them so that they could define their need for technology and their demand for the supply of ICT. Partnerships among civil society, international institutions, Governments and the private sector played a key role in that connection; those entities could act as intermediaries to help the rural poor articulate their demand for ICT products.

57. IFAD was already involved in such efforts. It had created three pilot networks in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Asia-Pacific region and Western and Central Africa, respectively. The networks, which were funded by IFAD and managed by local non-governmental organizations, connected the beneficiaries of 76 ongoing IFAD programmes and provided rural leaders with computer skills training, hardware and Internet access. Each community's needs were assessed by technical staff through public dialogue, and software packages and training programmes were then tailored to those needs. The networks enabled participants to share lessons learned on how to improve their living conditions, to cultivate electronic commerce opportunities and to exchange information on strategies for improving quality of life, inter alia through chat rooms, online conferences and electronic newsletters. In partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Bank, IFAD had also supported the establishment of an Agrarian Reform Network managed by an innovative coalition of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

58. The success of efforts to share ICT should be gauged by whether they improved the daily lives and reduced the vulnerability of the poor. IFAD welcomed the role of the United Nations in those efforts, which was central to the work of the entire development community.

59. **Mr. Pattanayak** (International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)) said that numerous activities were involved in the complex airspace management and meteorological information services provided to the nearly 100,000 flights that carried some 1 billion passengers per year. Those flights crossed the airspace of developed and developing countries alike. States were therefore interdependent in the area of civil aviation, which was a very important sector of the global economy, and connectivity represented a major challenge for the safety of civil aviation.

60. ICAO was responsible for setting rules, regulations and standards and for recommending practices for the safety and security of international civil aviation. Its web sites and technical cooperation programmes were considered a strategic information

resource. It was currently in the process of formulating a technical cooperation project to provide developing countries with computer hardware and software to give them access to its technical databases and to information on ensuring the safety of international civil aviation. He hoped that participants in the current meeting would advise their countries' civil aviation authorities to contact ICAO so that they could take advantage of that project.

61. **Mr. Mungra** (Suriname) said that the small island developing States appreciated the report of the high-level panel of experts on ICT (A/55/75-E/2000/55); four of the experts on the panel came from that group of States. The report rightly pointed out that the use of ICT was perhaps the only means by which those States could carve out niche markets for their unique endowments. In that connection, the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSNET) was an essential component of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and helped to redress the inadequate distribution and use of knowledge-based economies and ICT. He called upon the international community to strengthen and support further the development of SIDSNET, which also had applications for the international community as a whole. He looked forward to the Secretary-General's response to the panel's recommendation on achieving connectivity for all, including the small island developing States, by the end of 2004. Universal and concerted efforts under the dynamic leadership of the United Nations would be needed to bridge the digital divide for the sake of future generations.

62. *Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia) resumed the Chair*.

63. **Ms. Zuo Huanchen** (Vice-Mayor of Shanghai) said that a High-level Forum on City Informatization in the Asia-Pacific Region had been held in Shanghai from 5 to 7 June 2000. A very successful and fruitful event, with the theme "Promoting City Informatization for a Better Future", the Forum had brought together representatives of the United Nations system, municipal government officials from 23 countries of the region, international business leaders, information technology experts and researchers. Informatization was a new challenge as well as a new opportunity for humankind, but levels of development in information technology among the cities of the region were very uneven. She hoped that the outcome of the Forum would help promote ICT cooperation among the cities of the region and accelerate their economic and social development.

64. The outcome of the Forum included the adoption of a "Shanghai Declaration", the signing of agreements for four regional cooperation budgets, the establishment of a Cooperation Committee and a Cooperation Office for City Informatization in the Asia-Pacific region and the creation of a web site on city informatization. The Cooperation Committee would sponsor and coordinate training programmes, public information activities and exhibitions and would establish a network of exchanges and contacts among cities.

65. For Shanghai, the rapid development of informatization was critical for maintaining and improving its competitiveness as a major economic centre and international metropolis and for meeting the challenges of the knowledge-based economy and the Internet society. The city had therefore begun implementing informatization projects as early as 1994. Construction of the basic framework for e-commerce had been completed and it was expected that the informatization of Shanghai would be basically complete within five to 10 years. That would radically change the life of the city and the lifestyles of its population, and would help it become highly competitive, offering multiple business opportunities, low transaction costs and high-quality comprehensive services. With an active and pragmatic attitude and in a spirit of reform and innovation, Shanghai hoped to seize the opportunity to strengthen its exchanges and cooperation with global society and to meet the historic challenge of the information age.

66. **Mr. Andrews** (Population Communications International) said that, as a columnist for *The New York Times* had recently observed, one of the hallmarks of highly effective Governments was leadership in information and technology transfer. His organization welcomed the development of partnerships to speed the dissemination of technology and expertise, which could be mutually beneficial, and supported research and development in cutting-edge technologies, especially third-generation wireless adaptations, which could help overcome dependence on expensive telephone infrastructure. His organization was committed to working towards the values of partnership, common good, right of access, knowledge-sharing and equitable distribution. The fundamental right of access to information and knowledge was inherent in all existing

international declarations on the subject; without it, action plans and good intentions would come to nothing.

67. **Ms. Strauss** (World Information Transfer) said that her organization, which had been founded in 1987 in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, recognized the critical importance of information for safeguarding human health from environmental degradation. Ignorance, whether resulting from a lack of literacy or from a deliberate policy of withholding health-related information, adversely affected human and environmental health, and her organization's mandate was to disseminate verifiable information leading to science-based knowledge. It used traditional means of communication, such as a quarterly publication *The Written Word*, and ICT; it had organized a series of hands-on Internet workshops and was involved in developing a CD-ROM containing development and health information.

68. To take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICT, Governments should increase access to basic education and enter into partnerships with ICT businesses, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions to provide Internet access in schools, libraries and community centres. Change was an inevitable result of technological development. Traditions and policies that resisted new tools interfered with economic and social growth in the short run, although knowledge would inevitably find its way in the long run. Addressing those issues was critically important to all future generations.

69. **Ms. Walker** (Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (CONGO)) said that she was speaking on behalf of the Tunisia 21 Women's Association and the NGO Global Communications Network for Women. The Tunisia 21 Women's Association believed that the current explosion of information technology was making women who lacked skills and access to the information superhighway even more disempowered. An action plan to involve women in ICT must include the development of targeted methods for taking the benefits of the information revolution to women. Information technology was also central to poverty reduction, which in turn was central to women's empowerment.

70. The NGO Global Communications Network for Women had been set up by a worldwide coalition of more than 40 women's media networks. In the space of one year, it had created a global web site and several regional web sites, and there were plans for links with emerging community telecentres in Africa and elsewhere. At the recent "Beijing +5" special session of the General Assembly, the Network had undertaken a full programme of information-sharing so that women worldwide could participate in the discussions under way in New York through regional focal points, interactive television and radio web casts and an Internet café.

71. At its Millennium Assembly, the United Nations should proclaim the right of democratic and equitable access to information and communication services. A task force bringing together departments and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, multilateral development bodies, private industry, foundations, the mass media and non-governmental organizations should be set up to develop an ICT gender action plan. A fund should also be created to implement that plan, with financing from a variety of sources.

Ministerial Declaration on development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy
(E/2000/L.9)

72. *The Ministerial Declaration on development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy (E/2000/L.9) was adopted.*

73. **Mr. Gallagher** (United States of America) said that his country was pleased to join with other Member States in advocating the integration of the developing countries into the global information society and the bridging of the digital divide. The United States had initiated a number of programmes on information technology for development, including the Leland Initiative to bring Internet connectivity to sub-Saharan countries; the Internet for Economic Development Initiative, which sought to foster the growth of the Internet and of electronic commerce in developing countries; and the Technology Corps, a partnership between the public and private sectors to bring IT equipment and technology to developing countries. The

United States believed that the driving force behind the promotion of information technology was the private sector which had played a pivotal role wherever IT had flourished, thanks to a regulatory and legal framework which fostered private initiative and competition. The private sector must also play a leading role in placing IT at the service of development. The Ministerial Declaration did not sufficiently acknowledge the critical role of the private sector in achieving development in a knowledge-based global economy; without it, international efforts to use ICT for development were unlikely to succeed.

74. **Mr. Banigo** (Observer for Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration marked the beginning of concerted efforts to enable developing countries to become full partners in the information age. He hoped that Governments, multilateral agencies and the private sector would work assiduously to realize the high expectations embodied in the document.

75. **Mr. Le Gargasson** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, likewise welcomed the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration. The success of the high-level segment was reflected in the level of representation of Member States and especially in the massive presence of the private sector, which was perhaps unprecedented in the history of the United Nations. The innovative approaches taken to the work of the Council, including round tables, breakfast meetings and private sector presentations, promised new forms of partnership for the future which would be crucial in facing the challenges of the digital divide.

76. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) noted that the importance and timeliness of the Council's discussions had been reflected in a very high level of participation. Almost all United Nations agencies with a role in ICT had been represented by their executive heads, and large numbers of chief executives of private sector corporations had attended. The high-level segment had demonstrated the usefulness of the Council as a forum with the capacity to take up a policy issue that needed to be addressed. Although there had been many developments in the ICT area in recent years, the biggest changes lay ahead, and it was appropriate that the Council had begun its political discussions of ICT at the current juncture.

77. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the regional commissions, the specialized agencies and other bodies and departments within the United Nations system stood ready to work with vigour and coherence for the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration.

78. **The President** said that the high-level segment had simply marked the beginning of the international community's deliberations on how to harness knowledge and technology for development. The broad policy consensus that had been achieved was reflected in the Ministerial Declaration, the first document on that issue to be adopted at a high political level within the United Nations.

79. Hopes had been expressed that a global facility for ICT for development, akin to the Global Environment Facility, would be established to make much-needed resources available and to focus on harnessing knowledge and ICT for the development of many countries and peoples that risked marginalization in the new economy. Political will, national vision and programmes of action which clearly identified knowledge and ICT as elements of a coherent development effort would be critical to the beneficial integration of countries in the new global economy and to worldwide poverty eradication efforts. The statement made at an earlier meeting by President Konaré of Mali had illustrated the opportunities available to least developed countries which were willing to embrace the information revolution. President Konaré had warned that accepting Africa's marginalization and the exclusion of a large number of developing countries from the benefits of the new global economy could only result in worldwide destabilization.

80. Members of the Council had emphasized the unique role of the United Nations in promoting global development and international cooperation, as well as the need for further strengthening of the Organization and for more active international involvement in the management of trade for the benefit of all. The successful and beneficial integration of the poorest economies into the new global economy was the most important challenge facing the international community. Urgent and concerted national, regional and international action was needed to ensure more widespread, balanced and equitable economic growth and to promote the use of ICT for development. Many speakers had emphasized that ICT could play an

important role in accelerating growth, promoting sustainable development and eradicating poverty.

81. The Ministerial Declaration affirmed the Council as a body where new ideas on economic, social and related issues of development could be productively and effectively discussed at a high level. It also strengthened the Council's role in providing policy guidance and coordination in the area of information technology for development. The Council had demonstrated its unique capacity to bring together a truly universal forum to devise policy guidance on how best to place information technology at the service of development. The ministerial round-table breakfasts had facilitated an exchange of views on the role of ICT by all relevant stakeholders. An innovative exhibition had been mounted, affording an excellent opportunity to disseminate information on ICT and to showcase technologies which were currently available, affordable and applicable to development. The Council had also sought to raise public awareness of the issue by using state-of-the-art ICT for press and media coverage of the session and by broadcasting the high-level segment live on the Internet.

82. The high-level segment had been characterized by an excellent spirit of collegiality, cooperation and constructive engagement on the part of all members of the Council; accompanied by dedicated support from the Secretariat, without which the efforts of the high-level segment could not have been successful.

The meeting rose at 7.10 p.m.