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President: Mr. Han Seung-soo . . . . . (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 12 (*continued*)

Report of the Economic and Social Council

Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development

Mr. Mahendran (Sri Lanka): I listened with great care to the galaxy of speakers this morning, and what has to be said about information and communication technologies (ICT) has been said. What we have to do now is to take stock of how to proceed. In that regard, Mr. President, I was touched by a number of paragraphs of your statement, and I would like to read out some extracts:

> "However, we are faced by the sad reality that this immense potential of ICT is not being adequately harnessed currently. The digital divide threatens to further marginalize the economies and peoples of the developing countries, as well as of countries with economies in transition. Moreover, given the very dynamism of the ICT revolution, every day that passes without effective action further widens the divide, making the need for concerted effort by the international community a matter of utmost urgency." (*A/56/PV.101*)

Mr. President, these words of yours are what it is all about. Take the digital divide, for example. Whether it is between developed and developing nations, whether it is between the North and the South, whether it is between cities and villages, whether it is between communities, whether it is between races, ICT can play a very effective role in reducing that divide. But how do we proceed with this? That is the question that needs to be answered.

Mr. President, in your wisdom, you said much more, and I wish again to quote your words:

> "I think we all agree that political leadership and commitment at the highest level are necessary in order to integrate ICT for development programmes into national development strategies." (*ibid.*)

There again we come to the essence of the argument. We all know how beneficial ICT can be to all of us. But how do you bring about a marriage between the private sector, the governmental agencies, the United Nations and all other stakeholders in order to achieve substantial progress towards attaining what we are aiming at? That is going to be the real crux of what we face in the coming decade.

Fortunately, we have the umbrella of the United Nations, and we can go forward under that umbrella. I am sure that the giants of industry in the private sector would not begrudge a United Nations effort to bring about such a marriage. What we need here is a meeting of the minds. In order to bring this about, I think that you touched a chord, Mr. President, when you said to let this be a beginning: the political commitment of all

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of us to work towards a very necessary goal. If not, in countries such as ours, Sri Lanka, the people in the cities and in the villages will not be able to speak the same language in the future. The poor will get poorer, and the city folks will be much better off. The same applies to the North and the South, or to the developed and the developing world. That is going to be our problem.

The Sri Lanka delegation fully supports the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 this morning. We feel that it is time for all of us to sit down together, whether it be with IBM, Microsoft, Sony or Samsung. I am sure that those giant corporations can and will be convinced to join the ministries of our countries that handle ICT and to work with the United Nations to bring about the revolution we seek. As the President told us this morning, the digital divide is getting wider, not narrower. I hope we can achieve something in the future.

Mr. Arias (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU). We are witnessing the beginning of a new era marked by the birth of the information society, which is causing a profound change in our way of life. This will be a new civilization with characteristics and consequences similar to those of the industrial revolution in its time. It is our responsibility not to waste this opportunity, so that technological advances can promote greater well-being for society as a whole and provide a better quality of life for all citizens. Progress must reach all humanity.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have been the motor for the growth of economies since the beginning of the 1970s. They are probably one of the most powerful tools of globalization. The world is witnessing a transformation in the concept of information. It is no longer the heritage of the few. It has become a prerequisite for economic and social development. These technologies are creating a new economy in which the main challenge is to make the great benefits of the information revolution accessible to 4 billion people. We cannot afford to the let the digital disadvantage of two thirds of humanity continue to worsen. We must fight with determination against information poverty, for which we will need leadership and commitment at the highest level in the developing countries.

Information and communication technologies can bring great advantages to humanity. They are a tool in the fight against poverty, and they offer an opportunity for wealth creation, social cohesion and cultural diversity. Furthermore, they offer individuals — including in the developing countries — an opportunity for access to information and knowledge, which is essential for progress in the areas of education and health, and for economic progress in general.

The United Nations has a fundamental role to play in the information society, because the Organization provides a unique framework for the design of appropriate mechanisms to close the digital divide affecting humanity. The Economic and Social Council, conscious of its responsibilities, adopted its important resolution 2000/29, in which it decided to create the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force under the leadership of the Secretary-General. The European Union considers the establishment of the Task Force to be a timely and necessary initiative since information and communication technologies constitute a valuable instrument for the eradication of poverty.

However, the challenge is great. Therefore, the Task Force must mobilize Governments as well as civil society and the private sector in order to meet precise objectives on the path we must travel to close the digital divide. These meetings are among the milestones in this process; they provide an extraordinary sounding board for identifying the actions that must be taken to promote the information society.

The European Union is convinced that these meetings, together with the associated panels, will contribute to enriching the work of the World Summit on the Information Society, to take place in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunisia in 2005, with the objective of developing a strategic plan of action. It will be a United Nations summit at the level of heads of State or Government to which the European Union entrusts a crucial role in the design of tomorrow's society. The European Union will spare no effort to ensure its success.

However, it is not only United Nations Member States that are responsible for a positive outcome of the Summit. Non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society in general also have a fundamental role to play. In this regard, the European

Union believes that the Summit must not limit participation to heads of State or Government. Rather, from the preparatory process onward, it must be open to the participation of the private sector and of civil society. In addition, the European Union considers that the Summit must be organized in such a way that all sectors with a share of responsibility in the world of ICT will be able to contribute to its beneficial outcome. I am referring to a range of actors ranging from academia to the financial sector.

In our view, the Summit is the forum in which the following key issues must be addressed: the design of policies and regulatory frameworks to promote the growth of the ICT sector with a view to reducing the digital divide; the role of ICT in alleviating poverty and in promoting economic well-being, keeping in mind the role ICT can play in making Governments more transparent and more accountable to their citizens and in ensuring freedom of expression and full respect for democracy; the promotion of access to information and knowledge, including extremely important issues such as secure Internet access; and the establishment of new mechanisms for the governance of technologies — what has been called the regulation of globalization.

A good example of the attention that the European Union has been giving to the grave problems caused by the digital divide was the European Union's decision to sponsor the Group of Seven (G-7) Conference on the Information Society held in 1995 in Brussels. Since then, the European Union has on a number of occasions expressed its ambition to share the benefits of the new technologies on a global scale. In that context, we should consider the Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society adopted by the G-8, which established the Digital Opportunity Task Force, which has been doing important work.

Allow me to refer briefly to the efforts that the European Union has made so that the benefits of ICT can reach all its citizens, including those of European Union candidate countries. One of the top priorities of the European Union is the adoption of policies to strengthen a European information society. That has led to an initiative known as e-Europe, whose goal is to bring information closer to our citizens while being mindful of their cultural diversities. ICT provides new space for freedom of expression and intercultural dialogue, and can thus contribute to an affirmation of the cultural and linguistic diversity of peoples. In addition, at the European Council session in Barcelona, member States requested the Commission to draft a plan of action called e-Europe 2003, whose priorities include the strengthening of the three pillars of the information society: e-education, e-health and e-government. In this context, the international conference on e-government for development, held in Palermo, Italy, on 10 and 11 April, stressed the fact that ICT should not be considered in isolation but should instead be part of the overall strategy for development that the European Union wishes to promote in its cooperation programmes with other countries.

The EU wishes to reaffirm that it considers information and communication technologies to be an effective tool to fight poverty in order to attain the goals of the Millennium Declaration. Therefore, we are working closely with the international community to encourage the use of information and communication technologies, especially in the area of capacity-building. Those technologies will be a cross-cutting theme in all European Union programmes. In fact, significant resources are available in the Alliance for the Information Society programme for Latin America, in the Asia Information Technology and Communications programme for Asia and in the Euro-Mediterranean Information Society programme for the Mediterranean region. A programme for the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries is in its conceptual stage.

In that context, the EU understands that the International Telecommunication Union is a forum in which countries can exchange points of view on access to information. Moreover, the EU considers that, in its global strategy to close the digital divide, mechanisms of cooperation among United Nations agencies should be strengthened. Therefore, links should be established with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to work on e-education issues, with the World Health Organization to share experiences on e-health, and with other agencies of the United Nations system, without forgetting the regional economic commissions, always seeking the involvement of public and private actors that can contribute to a more balanced sharing of digital opportunities.

I should like to conclude my statement with an appeal for realism. It is certain that the new technologies are not the panacea for all the problems that humanity faces. However, they can assist

decisively in eradicating poverty, thus contributing to the attainment of the great goals of the Millennium Declaration.

Mr. Alvarez (Andorra): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your initiative to convene this important meeting, and to thank the Secretariat for the background documentation and for the preparation of the panel meetings.

Two years ago, information technology was at the core of the discussion during the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, underlining the significant role that information and communication technologies (ICT) play in the process of development. The United Nations ICT Task Force was then created to ensure the follow-up of those discussions and to undertake efforts to bridge the global digital divide, which remains a worrisome reality. Today, we are here to continue the review of the role of ICT in development and to prepare ourselves for the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held at Geneva and at Tunis.

I would like to underline four points of major interest to my Government. First, we believe that the international community should focus on ways and means of strengthening the structures that are crucial for technological development. The first step is to support national efforts aimed at establishing the necessary human and physical infrastructure for information and communication technologies. In that context, the private sector can play a significant role, especially in capacity-building and in encouraging investment in research and development. The second step consists of strengthening international research cooperation, which is a valuable tool to ensure access to and transfer of technology. In that respect, South-South cooperation has yielded good results. However, we believe that a key complement to successful South-South cooperation is North-South cooperation.

My second point relates to ICT and sustainable development. In general terms, information and communication technologies have been identified as the key determinants for creating a global knowledge-based economy, generating growth and creating employment and wealth. In more concrete terms, information and communication technologies help countries to better develop national policies — through, for example, the collection of data and the generation of indexes — and to better implement them via the transfer of information and knowledge.

Thirdly, we believe that partnerships between the private and public sectors within and among countries, as well as partnerships with the United Nations, play a unique role in forging development. Partnerships, especially between the public and private sectors, can be used to promote access to ICT, especially for the youngest members of society and for those whose access to new technologies may be compromised by an economic, social or physical handicap. For those reasons, we hope that the World Summit on the Information Society will be an opportunity for us to review the situation and to analyse additional partnership strategies to narrow the global digital divide that exists within and among countries.

Fourthly, and in conclusion, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the need to develop and promote the use of new technologies that are not only user-friendly but also low in cost. In that context, I would like to cite as an example a project that has been put forward by my Government — more precisely by its Commission for the Information Society — that we call the United Nations Mobile. In brief, the United Nations Mobile is a new communications channel, based on personal digital assistants, that can act as an information bridge between the members of the United Nations community and other users around the world. It allows users to obtain the most updated information, which Permanent Missions can then publish very easily on the Internet. In fact, this project was presented this afternoon, with great acceptance among some Assembly members, which may predict its success.

Mr. Niculescu (Romania): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the initiative to convene a meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development. For all those who invested a great deal of effort in making this event happen, it is especially gratifying to see so many prominent personalities, representing Governments, civil society, the business community and relevant international organizations, attending this special meeting.

Information and communication technologies are undoubtedly powerful tools for development, creating jobs and transforming, inter alia, education, health care, trade and politics. One of the most pressing challenges in the new century will be to harness that

extraordinary force, spread it throughout the world and make its benefits accessible to all humanity, in particular the poor.

Our discussions over the past several years have proved very useful in shaping the common vision set out in the Ministerial Declaration of the 2000 High-Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council and in the Millennium Declaration. We welcomed the ensuing steps taken, such as the launching of the United Nations ICT Task Force by the Secretary-General and of the Digital Opportunity Task Force within the Group of Eight, and especially their agreement to work together to advance a shared agenda. In the same vein, we salute the initiative to hold the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. Our meeting is thus well timed to sustain the momentum and to continue an inclusive approach that includes the participation of all stakeholders.

We are convinced that the United Nations system should play a leading role in all efforts directed at expanding the impact of ICT on development. That is why we hope that this meeting will address the digital divide in the context of globalization and the development process — both in plenary meeting and in panel discussions — and promote coherence and synergy among various regional and international information and communication technologies initiatives.

In that spirit, I would like to make a few comments about our experience using ICT in Romania and our specific contribution at the international level. A national strategy for the implementation of the information society has been developed in Romania through cooperation among civil society, the business community and the public administration. Just last year, an ICT promotion group was set up. That group is led by the Prime Minister and composed of e-ministers with a stake in e-development. The group has as mandate to facilitate and integrate all e-development for the benefit of citizens and the business community. At the same time, a package ICT of legislation was initiated by the specially created new Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. The Parliament has also adopted specific laws to provide regulation in various areas in this field. Those include laws on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data, the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the telecommunications sector, electronic signatures, electronic commerce and e-procurement.

The expansion of Internet use makes e-government possible. It also makes it necessary to reinvent the concept of Government, as well as its activities. The Government is therefore committed to using new technologies to better fulfil its obligations towards its citizens; to provide better education and social protection and to promote economic growth and ensure free-market competitiveness. Providing government services online will encourage better penetration of new technologies and will help boost infrastructure development. To illustrate this point, I would like to mention just two of the pilot projects that have been developed at the national level. One of the those projects involves online payment of local taxes, in order to reduce the delays and costs related to the slowness of circulating cash. The other involves utilizing e-procurement to ensure transparency and efficiency in public procurement processes.

On the international level, Romania is a member of the United Nations Information and Communication Technology Task Force, and is fully involved in the preparatory process for the World Summit on the Information Society. Within the context of the preparations for the Summit, a pan-European regional ministerial conference will be held in Bucharest from 7 to 9 September 2002. The Bucharest conference, which is being organized in cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, will provide both thematic debates and partnership events.

As far as the thematic debates are concerned, the themes will include knowledge-based society, e-government, access to infrastructure and institutional frameworks, trade in the new economy and quality of life in the information society. The partnership events will include a business round table and a civil society forum. In preparation for the Summit, the conference is designed to conduct a regional assessment, to establish a platform for dialogue that includes all major stakeholders, to develop a vision for a knowledge-based society and to prepare positions and identify key subjects, initiatives and networks in the region.

It is our understanding that by working together to bridge the digital divide, we can make an important contribution to global peace and progress. I extend our full support to the Assembly for a successful meeting.

Mr. Mahmood (Pakistan): I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the convening of these General Assembly meetings devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development. The topic itself assumes importance in view of the tremendous potential that information technologies have with regard to addressing development issues in all their aspects.

We would also like to avail ourselves of this opportunity to fully align ourselves with the statement made earlier by the Chairman of the Group of 77. His statement reflects the collective aspiration of developing countries to address development issues, specially the reduction of poverty.

In line with the Millennium Declaration, the Government of Pakistan recognizes the great potential of information and communication technologies in developing a knowledge-based economy and helping to reduce poverty. However, the widening digital divide is seriously undermining that potential. To bridge the digital divide it is necessary that concerted efforts be made for the development of human resources conversant with ICT. It is also necessary to expand telecommunication infrastructures and to ensure the widespread use of computers. Unless those three fundamental ingredients are present, the goal of using ICT to bridge the digital divide will remain elusive. It is therefore essential that we take a realistic view of the situation and address the issues that might obstruct attaining these very fundamental goals.

First, it is unreasonable to expect poor people struggling to earn their living to make an investment in computers. It would be equally naive to think that Governments of developing countries will have resources to roll out telecommunications infrastructure in uneconomic rural areas, where poor people live, or to make investments in raising people's computer literacy at the village level.

Secondly, the unaffordable cost of software and business strategies that involve frequent upgrades that require a continual drain of resources from a poor man's pocket are great deterrents. It is therefore necessary that multilateral donors, bilateral donors, aid-giving agencies and large entrepreneurs take the lead in meeting the costs of expanding and operating ICT infrastructure and of developing open-source software to help the poor have access to the immense resources and potential of ICT.

It would be desirable for a suitably large ICT fund to be created by business, entrepreneurs, technology companies and a variety of donors to help provide the means for poorer countries to gain access to the potential of ICT. Investment through such a fund could be viewed as a means of opening new markets in the long term. For companies that want to be independent of a common fund, appropriate tax incentives or insurance schemes could be devised by developed countries to provide the necessary funding to developing countries.

In conclusion, I would like to state that the Government of Pakistan is fully committed to promoting ICT as one of the vehicles of development. An aggressive programme for human resources development has been launched, bandwidth prices have been reduced from $83,000 per E-1 line to $6,000 per E-1 line, and access to the Internet has been provided for more than 700 towns. The availability of reliable international bandwidth has been increased to 410 megabits per second. Four mobile companies are rolling out mobile telephone services, and programmes, including those relating to e-government and e-commerce, are being launched.

We look forward wholeheartedly to working with the United Nations and its Information and Communication Technologies Task Force towards the implementation of information communication technologies for development. We also welcome the decision to convene the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held at Geneva in December 2003 and at Tunis in December 2005.

Mr. Villanueva (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): One of the most disturbing aspects of the current process of economic globalization is the concentration of technological capacity and innovation in a minority of countries. According to the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2001*, in 1998 the 29 countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) spent $520 billion on research and development — an amount greater than the combined economic output of the 88 poorest countries of the world. This expenditure on technological research and development leads not only to constant innovation, but to ownership and, therefore, to exclusion. Indeed, the countries of OECD, which account for only 14 per cent of the world's population, were responsible for 86 per cent of the 836,000 patent

applications filed in 1998 and for 85 per cent of the 437,000 articles that appeared in specialized technical publications worldwide. In addition, 66 per cent of all royalties and licensing rights for 1999 were shared by just two industrialized countries.

Furthermore, technology is distributed unequally. The richest countries have more than 80 per cent of the world's Internet users. In the developing countries, there are only 69 fixed-line telephones for every 1,000 people, while in the countries members of OECD teledensity is 509 per 1,000 people. The bandwidth of the whole of Latin America is broadly equivalent to that of the city of Seoul. All of these figures point to a clear diagnosis: with regard to technological advances, countries that are not in the mainstream are left behind or left out, and this has a decisive impact on their development potential and their economic viability.

The challenge, therefore, is how to bridge this digital and technological divide. In other words, what measures can we adopt at the international, regional and national levels to help those countries that are not in the mainstream to benefit from and participate in the technological revolution and in globalization? This should not be a matter of merely facilitating access by people from our countries to new technologies — although that is certainly important, and to that end we must address the issue of revenue bottlenecks. Faced with a lack of purchasing power and the inability to allocate income for Internet use, it is very difficult for us to disseminate new information and communication technologies among our population.

We must also deal with the problems of generating technologies at the national level and of adapting the nature of information to the situation of each country. This brings us to the heart of the problem: tackling the issue of developing human resources. And the key to that is education. Without education we cannot bridge the digital and technological divide, still less resolve the problem of poverty.

In this regard, the Government of Peru has embarked on an unprecedented programme aimed at bringing technological progress closer to the poorest groups, in particular the rural population. The Huascarán Plan — named, for symbolic reasons, after the highest mountain in our country — has, in just a few months, connected more than 100 rural and urban schools to Internet services, supported by specialized digital libraries and teacher training through the use of videoconferencing. We hope that by 2006, over 15,000 high schools — accounting for nearly all Peruvian students — will be included in this information and communications network.

My country firmly believes that this effort will affect the education and other aspects of the life of Peruvian students, having a positive influence on their families and communities, strengthening their economic activities, which are basically agricultural, and directing them towards new opportunities and markets. Important as such efforts are, however, they are insufficient given the grave technological underdevelopment confronting many developing countries. The widening technological divide between those societies in the vanguard of the technological advance and those that are standing still is contributing to the spread of chaos, poverty and conflict, and this is becoming a problem of global proportions.

We must therefore take advantage of the positive potential of this revolution to shape democratic societies and promote citizen participation, efficient and transparent governance and competitive economies. In this context, Peru welcomes the fact that the United Nations has taken the initiative to meet this challenge; here, we again welcome the creation of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force and the work that it is carrying out. We hope that the Task Force will make it possible to reverse the current trend and enable the developing countries to participate in mechanisms for the control and dissemination of information and communication technologies. We therefore support the work plan that has been developed by the Task Force.

Peru believes that, in the context of that work plan, particular attention must be given to four objectives: strengthening human resources; creating jobs, particularly for young people; supporting improved competitiveness in our economies, particularly through access to and dissemination of technology in small and medium-sized companies; and identifying new sources of financing.

Let us hope that this exchange of opinions, experience and determination, as well as the effective implementation of the plan of action of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force, will contribute to greater international awareness and to the adoption of effective measures to minimize the

imbalances from which we are currently suffering with the legitimate hope of eliminating them.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is an honour for me, on behalf of the State of Qatar, to offer my sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on presiding over the General Assembly during its meeting devoted to information and communications technologies (ICT) for development in preparation for the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society. I am pleased that my delegation is able to participate in this important discussion — one that we hope will reach useful conclusions, thereby increasing the possibility that the Summit will be a great success.

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, human society has been constantly developing information and knowledge. The development that has been achieved to date has completely changed the shape of the world, and we cannot compare yesterday's ICT to today's. The present is saturated with knowledge, science and means of modern communication that have been of service to humanity. With the availability of ICT, the world is within the easy reach of all. Events that occur in the East reach the West almost immediately and directly, as if we were living through the same event. This is remarkable, particularly if it is used, in the people's interest, to portray the reality of the human condition, something that promotes empathy among human beings.

But it is a matter of concern that the huge potential of the ICT revolution is not adequately reflected in the development policies, programmes and projects of some countries. The United Nations, with its moral status, universality and representative nature, is in a unique position to crystallise a vision of ICT as a constructive element in providing information and knowledge to the world's poorest people. Such technologies could be used to support United Nations efforts to eradicate poverty, promote awareness and prevent contagious diseases such as AIDS. In order for us to obtain tangible ongoing results in this area, action to harness ICT for development should be local, while cooperation at the regional and subregional levels should be promoted.

In order to provide access to ICT for the poor of society, we should use new models and make full use of the available innovation to improve the health and education of the poor. Let us be realistic: ICT is not a panacea for poverty or development problems. Yet it is capable of making a larger contribution to addressing many of the development challenges before us.

As to the preparatory work for the World Summit on the Information Society, the indicators are very encouraging. We seem to be moving in the right direction in this preparatory process, particularly as concerns worldwide regional meetings and conferences. In the Arab region, the sixth meeting of Arab Ministers of Communication was held on 12 June 2002; there we considered how to implement the Arab ICT strategy in the service of the development of the countries of the region, and how to develop communications among the States of the region and how to connect them in all spheres, including education, health, commerce and economics. Participants at the meeting also considered the decisions and resolutions of the Beirut Arab Summit as they relate to this strategy, and considered the preparations being made for the World Summit on the Information Society, which will be held in Geneva and in Tunisia. These preparatory meetings will be very useful to ensure the success of the World Summit, particularly if they address concerns and make recommendations to the World Summit. Everyone is looking forward to this in order to serve countries that have not fully shared in the ICT revolution. We cannot predict the future of the ICT revolution. New things are invented every day. We are simply asking that the revolution be used in the interest of humanity.

Communications has become a huge and profitable market, particularly for those companies that manufacture communications equipment. While we admire their inventions and the development of modern means of communication, at the same time we call upon them to consider the situation of the poor and the least developed countries, since they are in dire need of outside assistance in order to develop their own communication centres that would link them with the outside world and with what happens there.

Mr. Clodumar (Nauru): I have the pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the members of the Pacific Islands Forum group that are Members of the United Nations, namely Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country, Nauru.

Our group is particularly pleased to participate in this important discussion. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are viewed by Governments, the private sector and users in many walks of life in the Pacific islands as holding much promise for development, so much so that "ICT for every Pacific islander" has been chosen as the theme for recent regional events in the sector. This theme has led to the proposal of a Pacific ICT for development (I4D) initiative for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which I will describe in a moment. But first, I would like to highlight the Pacific context and what ICT means to us.

For small islands dispersed over vast ocean distances, facing limited natural resources and high transportation costs, more efficient and affordable information and communication technologies are essential to connect our island communities to the rest of the world. With the Internet transforming the way we do business, access to the Internet by Governments, businesses and the general public is essential for economic development. Full participation in many sectors is now impossible without reliable and affordable access.

The Pacific has come a long way in a short time. Consider where we were as recently as 1995: faxes were a novelty, and there was no such thing as e-mail or web browsing for most Pacific people. Now we consider the Internet to be an essential service, we cannot work without e-mail and we expect our mobile phones to roam across all countries seamlessly. Even more impressive are three of the recent promising regional success stories: distance education, telemedicine and the use of satellite technology to provide access in remote areas. There is a better future for the Pacific, and ICT holds one of the most important keys to creating it.

Promoting ICT development, however, takes concerted national and regional efforts. The question is: how should we respond to these challenges and opportunities? The Pacific region has come together to develop its answer to that question. The regional goal is to create an environment where all stakeholders — Governments, teachers and students, business people, doctors and non-governmental organizations — are provided with the tools they need to further their own development, and through the aggregation of these individual efforts, that of our countries and the region.

To coordinate domestic and international efforts, the Pacific region has developed a framework to bring many diverse threads together. The Pacific islands ICT policy and strategic plan developed recently by ministers of the 16-member Pacific Islands Forum is intended to leverage our collective expertise and make the most of our resources. The report of the high-level meeting in that regard is annexed to document A/56/968, and copies of the full text of the regional policy and strategic plan are available in the General Assembly Hall for the information of interested delegations.

That framework includes a four-pronged strategy to develop human resources, infrastructure, Internet applications and policy and regulations for the development of the Pacific islands. Within this framework, a consensus has emerged on the four top priorities: human resources development for ICT professionals; refinement and promotion of national ICT strategies; continued development of telemedicine for remote consultation and diagnosis; provision of multi-purpose community telecentres for universal access to the information age.

The Pacific region has emphasized the need to think regionally when developing an implementation strategy on those issues. In the areas of international policy, access to development assistance and political support, we stand together through our partnerships among Governments, regional organizations, industry and multilateral agencies.

It is for these reasons that we have proposed the Pacific I4D initiative as our framework for partnership through the process of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Its goal is to provide access to information and communication technology in support of sustainable development for every Pacific islander. The Pacific I4D initiative represents the direct implementation of the activities called for in chapter 40 of Agenda 21, on information for decision-making, which states that in sustainable development, everyone is a user and provider of information considered in the broadest sense.

The objectives therefore include: strengthening existing national and international mechanisms of information processing and exchange, and of related technical assistance, so as to ensure the effective and equitable availability of information generated at the local, provincial, national and international levels;

strengthening national capacities, including capacities within Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in information handling and communication, particularly within developing countries; pursuing initiatives that support information-sharing, facilitate intergovernmental negotiations, monitor efforts for sustainable development, transmit environmental alerts and share data; and developing when necessary new technology to permit the participation of those not served at present by existing infrastructure and methods.

The Pacific I4D initiative is also in line with chapter VI of the United Nations Millennium Declaration in ensuring that Pacific island men and women are given equal opportunities to benefit from development through access to information.

Over the years, Pacific countries have shown that cooperative regional and international initiatives, combined with determined national efforts, can help to overcome the challenges I described earlier. We in the Pacific are known for our sense of community, and we know that by supporting each other, much can be achieved. I commend to the Assembly the Pacific islands ICT policy and the Pacific I4D initiative as road maps to a better future in our region and ask for support in implementing them.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): At the outset, Mr. President, let me thank you and your country, the Republic of Korea, for initiating this timely meeting on the important subject of information and communication technologies (ICT) for development. Permit me also to thank the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Chairman of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force, the representative of the Digital Opportunity Task Force and the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for their important statements.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Vice-Minister for Science and Technology of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. However, I wish to take this opportunity to make a brief statement on a number of issues of particular interest to my delegation.

Information and communication technology has revolutionalized the world. The ICT revolution, with its knowledge and technological capacities, has an immense potential to accelerate the growth and development of the developing countries. It is indeed encouraging to note that throughout the world, about 400 million people are connected to cyberspace. However, my delegation is saddened that only 5 per cent of that figure represents those residing in developing countries. Clearly the developing world is lagging far behind. The international community must address the digital divide between developed and developing countries if it is serious about implementing the Millennium Development Goals.

This meeting is a step in the right direction as it brings together relevant stakeholders — government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, multilateral development institutions and the United Nations — at the same forum to exchange ideas and experience with a view to promote and forge a common undertaking to address the global digital disparity. My delegation looks forward especially to the discussion in the more interactive informal panels. The meeting also allows Member States to provide some ideas and views on the preparatory work of the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005.

The United Nations ICT Task Force was launched last November by the Secretary-General with a view to positioning ICT as an enabling factor in the building of a poverty-free world. We hope that the ICT Task Force will catalyse the bridging of the global digital divide and foster digital opportunities that put ICT at the service of development for all. The challenge for the international community is to technologically empower the marginalized 4 billion of the world's population so they can participate in and benefit from the ICT revolution. Genuine international cooperation is essential to ensure a real, tangible and sustained transfer of knowledge and ICT technology to developing countries.

Information represents a powerful tool to enrich and empower all humankind, as a knowledgeable society would generate more benefits for the peoples of the world. At the Millennium Summit, our leaders, aspired to the right to universal access to information and communication technologies. The developed countries must therefore assist the developing countries in their efforts to develop those technologies, as embodied in the Millennium Declaration agreed upon by our leaders. The work of the ICT Task Force and the Group of Eight Digital Opportunity Task Force are critical in this regard.

The Internet has sparked the creation of a new era for humankind. Nations have to adapt to the revolution in the information sector in order to progress. Knowledge has become a factor for change, and since the early 1990s the Government of Malaysia has embarked on a quest to transform Malaysians into a knowledge society. The National Information Technology Council (NITC) was established in 1994 with the vision of creating an information-rich society to enhance the development and utilization of ICT as a strategic technology for national development. The NITC acts as a think tank at the highest level and advises the Government on matters pertaining to the development of ICT in Malaysia. It is a smart partnership among the private, public and community sectors. In addition to the multimedia super-corridor initiative, our national information technology agenda was formulated in 1996 to provide a comprehensive framework for development in the information age.

It is important that efforts to bridge the information and knowledge gap are focused not just on the gap between Malaysia and other nations, but also on the gap between local communities in Malaysia itself. The number of Internet users in Malaysia has increased fourfold, or 400 per cent, from 1.6 million in 1998 to 6.5 million in 2001. We expect the number will surge to 10 million next year.

Nevertheless, what is more critical is to foster the use of technology so that all segments of society will seize the opportunities emerging from the information age. In Malaysia, we have identified five segments of the population threatened with marginalization by the ICT revolution: senior citizens, youth, women, people with disabilities, and geographically isolated communities. Together, they constitute almost half of the country's population. The NITC's social digital inclusion programme aims to address those community groups to ensure that the digital divide is bridged for every sector of the community.

An important segment of the population is the younger generation. In Malaysia, one third of our population is under 14 years old. It is essential to provide early ICT exposure to that group through appropriate programmes or projects in order to develop the potential human capital for the knowledge economy. In March 2002, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, together with the United Nations Development Programme and Coca-Cola, embarked on a new partnership and pilot project, "e-Learning for life", to spearhead efforts to bridge the digital divide in Malaysia. The goal is to help local communities bridge the growing digital divide between ICT haves and have-nots. It will bring e-learning opportunities and ICT training resources to students, to teachers and to local communities. The project is an example of how the United Nations and the private sector can assist in supporting a national Government's vision of building a knowledge-based society in one country.

In its efforts to promote international cooperation in the area of information and communication technologies — especially among developing countries — Malaysia is privileged and pleased to have been chosen to host the secretariat of the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), a growing partnership of public, private and non-profit/non-governmental organizations around the world that are dedicated to promoting information and knowledge for development. Through the GKP, Malaysia hopes to promote enhanced South-South cooperation as well as North-South cooperation in bridging the global digital divide and in nurturing the global information society.

Sustainable development on a global scale requires accelerated transfer of knowledge and technology — especially ICT — to developing countries from developed countries. The United Nations is well positioned to take a lead role in shaping the global ICT vision for development. The challenge for the international community is not only to bridge the existing global digital divide, but also to avert its further widening. Otherwise, developing countries will be further marginalized in the information age by the wave of globalization. Therein lies the importance of this meeting and the commendable role played by the Republic of Korea in initiating it. We trust that there will be follow-up actions to assist developing countries in that regard.

Mr. Ehandi (Estonia): I represent the Look@World Foundation, which is an initiative of major private sector companies in Estonia: banks, telecommunications companies and information technology companies. Last year, those companies formed the Foundation to promote Internet use and build the information society in Estonia. To that end, they are now prepared to invest funds equal to 25 to 30 per cent of the State's annual information technology budget — quite a significant contribution. Besides making investments, the Foundation acts as a

moderator among various societal sectors in order to advance the information society.

My statement is intended mostly to provide information for developing countries, because I believe that Estonia has been successful thus far in its efforts and that other countries can benefit from them. In addition, it is our view that in many areas, rather than imitating the European Union countries and other developed nations, we can and should do things differently. We realize that information and communication technologies (ICT) and the information society are not yet main priorities of many countries. However, access to information leads to knowledge, and in the future knowledge will be the main factor of production and competition, to which we all aspire.

Now I should like to share with the Assembly some of the reasons for Estonia's success. First, it will come as no surprise that there is dedicated political and business leadership. It is hard to believe how much depends on such leadership in Estonia, compared with some of the neighbouring countries. The prompt start-up — from scratch — of such initiatives as the famous Estonian paperless e-government system and the Tiger Leap project was made possible by political will. In Estonia, well-considered grass-roots initiatives have quickly become official policy, involving all possible stakeholders from all possible sectors and then spreading throughout society. Our politicians have come to understand that the most effective way to reduce the overhead costs of government is to use ICT.

Mr. Ouch (Cambodia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Some time ago, I had the opportunity to hear a presentation on ICT by the Prime Minister of another Eastern European country. It was a nice speech and was well delivered, but somehow I got the feeling that he did not understand a word that he was reading. When one compares the information society in Estonia and in that country, one can see the difference in our daily lives. It is tremendously important that political leaders be empowered to build the information society, that they understand it and that they participate in its advancement. A problem of politicians — and since I represent the private sector, I can say this — is that, for them, everything that seems of even moderate importance becomes a priority. There are too many priorities, and no one can distinguish between true priorities and mere slogans. In order to build a functioning information society, we must make that objective a true priority.

Secondly — and this is a very important point — our experience has shown us that a lack of resources is not always bad. As a former country of the Soviet Union, Estonia does not have lavish resources, but we believe that that has worked in our favour. For example, in Germany, every major city — such as Berlin, Bremen or Hamburg — builds its own e-citizen portal. When I asked German officials when and how those systems would be integrated into one system for their citizens, they answered that they did not understand why that should be necessary. It took me a while to understand that in Germany, every city has ample funds to make its own investments, and that cities would rather compete than cooperate to offer the best services for their citizens. Such practices may work in richer countries, but, thank goodness, we cannot employ them in Estonia, where funds are scarce. Not only must our municipalities determine how they can pool their resources, but the entire public sector must cooperate and work with the private sector.

There are a number of examples of the various sectors cooperating in Estonia. An example is our digital signature and electronic identification card, where the private sector set up the certification agency and the infrastructure and the State financed the production of the cards. There is also the example of developing public-access Internet points, where the initial investment in computers and connections came mostly from the private sector and where municipalities pay all the costs of operation. And there is the example of the e-citizen portal currently being built, where the State is building a common technical solution to provide e-services that include high-level security and authorization systems and so on. As part of that portal, the central Government, municipalities and private sector service providers will all participate. Again, this is a case of cooperation. The lack of financial resources is therefore good sometimes, because one then has no money to make exaggerated systems that, while fancy, may be of little use.

My third point, one which I think is quite interesting, is that Governments should outsource everything but decision-making. The fact is that the private sector has better know-how about how to build e-services and information systems. It should not be a goal for a State to have a great and very large information technology team, or even a ministry. There

must just be a good project management team that ties together all the needs of the State and outsources all the systems and services. Even State databases can in theory be outsourced to a private company. In the end, things turn out to be cheaper and more professional when done this way. Do not be afraid to outsource and use private sector operators.

My next point has to do with deriving value from integration. The only point of making services available online is to make citizens' lives cheaper, quicker, easier, more comfortable or more fun; in other words, to provide real value. Cheaper, quicker and easier together make up efficiency, which, again, is the major driver and motivator for a State to build an information society.

Most services, such as health care and education, integrate data, include the involvement of several different governmental bodies, integrate central Government and local government activities and even include public sector services. There are many players. States should not deal with those services from an institutional perspective that says, "I bring my part to the Internet, let the municipalities and the private sector make their contribution." If one integrated service is cut into pieces, and if different bodies are making different contributions to the Internet, then there is absolutely no value created. I ask countries to please handle the services they want to bring to the Internet from a customer's point of view; consider how he or she will best get results and then involve all parties concerned with a given service and make the service available online in cooperation with all the players. Only then will e-service provide real value. Only then will investment not be wasted.

Very often the problem in this regard is the attitude of one sector towards another. The private sector often considers the State to be stupid. The State, however, cannot listen to just one player in the private sector, as that would be unfair to competitors and could be called corruption. To my surprise, for example, in Estonia a third-sector body like the Look@World Foundation, which I represent, has proven to be a suitable solution. We represent many powerful private sector companies, including all the biggest companies having an interest in the information society. Many of them compete among themselves. If it is inconvenient for the State to deal with one of those companies, then they are very open to deal with us. We therefore very much act as moderators between visions and the need for cooperation between the sectors in Estonia.

I would now like to give some hints about how to avoid a digital divide. We all know that the wealthy and younger parts of the population grasp the Internet and e-services more easily. We therefore all face the danger of a digital divide, irrespective of how wealthy or poor we are. To simplify things, let me say that we in Estonia have identified four preconditions necessary for someone to use the Internet and e-services. First, of course, there must be physical access to the Internet. Secondly, there must be content and services available. Thirdly, there must be motivation, by which we mean that a person must understand that using Internet services will bring him some value. And, fourthly, of course, there must be training; one must know how to use the Internet.

Meeting three of these preconditions without the fourth would not produce an Internet user; I ask members to think of their own experience. Omitting one of those preconditions would mean that one could not use the Internet. The real question here is the order in which one should provide the conditions so that investments can be made more wisely. I will not dwell much on content and motivation, as that is what most of my speech has been about. Rather, I will touch on access and training. As computer and broadband access in each home is still a far-off dream for must of us here, we in Estonia have started with public places. For several years now, 100 per cent of schools, 100 per cent of public sector organizations and about 90 per cent of the private sector in Estonia have had Internet access. So we have started from the places where people work. In addition, in a country as small as Estonia, municipalities and the Look@World Foundation have together created about 500 public access Internet points. That represents about one computer per 1,000 citizens, and we are continuing that process. I believe that this has given most citizens the ability to use the Internet if they have even the slightest desire to do so.

The second thing, of course, is training. Just this April, we started a project in Estonia to give basic training on how to use computers and the Internet to 100,000 citizens over a two-year period; this represents 10 per cent of our adult population. What is probably most important in this regard is the fact that the programme costs only about $25 to train one person, which is unbelievably cheap. We have just finished the

first pilot project, which was very successful. I was very happy to have heard here that the Republic of Korea has a similar project under way. The difference is probably that in Estonia the training project is fully financed by the private sector.

Another important hint for members, which they have already heard several times today, is the importance of liberalizing the telecommunication market. In fact, members have probably heard it hundreds of times: liberalize your telecommunication market and do not be afraid of competition. Nevertheless, in most countries liberalization takes more time than necessary. The major reason for not using the Internet is the cost, especially in poor countries. While in Finland or Sweden, for example, a person's decision to buy a computer and a permanent Internet connection depends mostly on will, in the majority of the world it is the money that counts. If we are to make cut prices, then the first step is to liberalize the telecommunication market. Do it. Do not be afraid.

My last, and very important, message to Governments is that the technology is itself actually very easy; it is the organizational structure and habits that create a bottleneck. Many people think that the information society is difficult because it involves complicated technology. But that is very wrong. Technology and information technology are easy; there are plenty of professionals out there who know all about it.

Back during a European Union meeting in Brussels we presented our Estonian paperless e-government system. As part of that system, for example, each and every Government decision is up on the Internet within 40 seconds after the sounding of the Prime Minister's gong. After that meeting, some French politicians came to us, investigated the system and were astonished. They asked us whether our Government really wanted such a system. Their concern was obvious. Why would a Government want to be so transparent and efficient? That is not the way that things are done. Indeed, implementing e-services and involving technology does nothing without changing organization, the process of offering services and even laws.

In the private sector, we say that there is nothing more stable than continuous adaptation to change. But so far, Governments have mostly refused to acknowledge that nowadays society is in a process of continuous acceleration, and they are not willing to change the way in which things are done.

If Governments want results and true value from the information society, therefore they must, before starting to use ICT within the public sector and turning public sector services into e-services, consider how much they are really ready to change processes and the way in which things are done. That seems to be a simple suggestion, but such change is strangely difficult to achieve in reality.

That is pretty much all that I have to say. To sum up, looking back I think that we have been very lucky in Estonia to have made the right decisions and choices so far. We want to share our experience. Estonia has already hosted official delegations from Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Armenia to talk about how we are moving towards the information society and e-government. Soon, people from Uzbekistan, Mongolia and Bulgaria will be visiting us.

Estonia is considering the idea of establishing an e-government academy so that we can start sharing our experience and expertise in an appropriate and structured way, rather than just when delegations come to visit. I cannot make any promises, but I hope we will be able to implement the idea by the end of the year. Then all will be welcome to come to Estonia to share their ideas and learn from our best practices and our experience so that we can move, together, towards an effective information society that provides value.

Mr. Korotkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The fact that the General Assembly is considering a range of questions regarding the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) in today's world attests to the relevance and practical significance of this issue for the entire international community. Nobody can doubt that the development of information and communication technologies is one of the key conditions for sustainable development and thus for ensuring stability and security in the world.

In order to construct an information society, the international community must resolve complex tasks relating to, first and foremost, the establishment of adequate social and economic conditions and the elimination of the gap between developed and developing countries. Those objectives have been clearly set out — in the Millennium Declaration, as well as in decisions taken by various United Nations

forums in the past few years, including at the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development.

Furthermore, it should be clearly understood that the information revolution not only offers expanded possibilities and increased potential, but entails clear challenges and risks. Our common task is to identify and meet such challenges in a timely manner. The priority objective in this respect is bridging the digital divide. This will require joint efforts aimed at resolving a range of questions relating to the establishment of the necessary institutional and technological infrastructures, the training of skilled personnel and many other issues.

There are also dangers associated with the vulnerability of communities that are connected to the Internet. The war against international terrorism — in particular cyber-terrorism and cyber-crime — requires a special emphasis on information security. Furthermore, we must not permit — on the pretext of ensuring information security or for any other reason — the forced homogeneity of cultures or the stifling of the original and unique nature of the national traditions that form the shared heritage of humankind.

The Russian Government is fully aware of the importance of the application of information technology. In January this year, the Russian Government established a programme called "Electronic Russia 2002-2010". For an eight-year period, the Government will be interacting with civil society and the business sector at both national and international levels, with a view to increasing access to new developments in information technology for the majority of the citizens of our country.

We are holding round-table discussions with representatives of non-governmental organizations and business in order to draw up joint approaches aimed at achieving those objectives through new legislation and technology-related decisions. During a recent round table in my ministry, we gathered together representatives of competing companies, including IBM, Microsoft and Sun-Oracle, and asked them whether they could form a joint foundation on the basis of which they could work together to facilitate, for example, the circulation of electronic documents. I am glad to say that such solutions were found, and that today they are being used not only in major centres in Russia but in all 89 regions of our country.

The inaugural meeting of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force Regional Node for Europe and Central Asia was held at Geneva on 29 April this year. This brings together the scientific, educational and training networks of the States concerned and will enable us to avoid duplication when investing in similar projects in various spheres of knowledge.

In Russia we are planning to focus attention on several key areas. We believe that health-related issues will be among the most important issues in the twenty-first century. We therefore want to ensure that information technology is used in the service of health care, and to that end we are developing an electronic health-care programme.

We believe that developments in the educational field are of crucial importance. That is why the second key aspect of our programme will consist of projects related to distance learning and other electronic study and training projects.

Finally, we believe that it is very important to preserve for humankind the cultural, social and religious variety that exists in the world. For that reason, we will try to ensure that this body of knowledge is preserved, and will endeavour to build on it with the assistance of information technology.

A practical solution to the issue of bridging the digital divide would be truly advanced by increased assistance, inter alia through the United Nations, to all countries interested in the development of information technology. We call upon all to join forces in this endeavour.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica): At the outset, let me associate the Jamaican delegation with the statement made earlier today by the Chair of the Group of 77 and China.

Bridging the digital divide means that our populations will be able to exploit information and communications technologies (ICT) for social and productive advantage. We know that information, linked to knowledge and communication technologies, can enable us to plan, make decisions, innovate and implement new activities in areas including education, government services, medicine, business and essential services, such as disaster mitigation.

This meeting of the General Assembly, which builds on the initiatives taken by the Secretary-General

in the establishment of the ICT Task Force and by the Economic and Social Council, should, in the view of my delegation, focus particularly on policies which will enable citizens to access information generally needed by the public. This must be done by ensuring that there are digital networks in each country or region; that there is access to the Internet as a means of distributing and sharing information; that the bandwidth used is adequate; and that there are local telecentres where the public can access the Internet and the needed information. Access by the citizenry is dependent on diffusion of the technology and services to individuals and households, to educational institutions and to other public institutions such as libraries and community centres. Effective delivery of information services also requires that citizens be aware of a single point of entry to information held by their Governments and related agencies. This portal or gateway would thus serve as a guide to the related agencies and would enable access to a variety of sources.

ICT requires appropriate infrastructure, human, technical and material resources and facilities to ensure public access to the Internet at convenient locations. While advances have been made in many developing countries to increase public access to information via ICT, there is still the need to extend pilot projects to the wider population. Community telecentres in libraries, in non-governmental organizations and in community centres, matched with extended digital networking infrastructure, are therefore needed.

How then, we must ask, does the citizenry participate in this process of accessing and using information? They are involved in registering their civil status, educating themselves and their families, sustaining their farming and other production and introducing innovative business practices. The connectivity afforded by information technology can enable citizens to carry out these functions more effectively and to use information to protect themselves against disasters, particularly natural disasters.

Governments now have the opportunity to begin to use ICT in the provision of basic social services, including education and health, and to begin to implement electronic government by providing services online to citizens. Advantages include enabling citizens to have decentralized access to information and services. A person away from the capital should be able to access forms, submit applications and obtain needed data for decision-making or for further action. Reliable low-cost access influences the degree to which ICTs can be used by the population. In this regard, many Governments have introduced regulatory initiatives to enhance network competition.

Jamaica, a small island developing State, is very conscious of the major role of information in national development. Our Government very recently passed the Access to Information Act 2002, which is intended to reinforce and give further effect to certain fundamental principles underlying the system of constitutional democracy, namely governmental accountability, transparency and public participation in decision-making. We fully recognize that to fully implement the Act, Jamaica will need to expand the applications of electronic government; to enable development of related policies, human and technical resources and infrastructure; and to exploit information and communication technologies to enable citizens to have full access to official information.

Implementation of the Act, and other development initiatives, are greatly facilitated by the strategic use of information and communication technologies at the national, regional and international levels. I would draw attention to SIDSnet, developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the private sector, which already links small island States Members of the United Nations, enabling exchange of information on our sustainable development activities.

Within the Caribbean Community Single Market and Economy, the Council on Trade and Economic Development provides an intergovernmental network for the harmonization of these policies and for implementation on a regional basis. The University of the West Indies, a regional institution, uses distance education to link its campus and non-campus territories.

In Jamaica, liberalization, which we expect to be the driver of competition and expanded value-added services, has already been implemented through our Telecommunications Act of 2000. In that regard, the Office of Utility Regulation is engaged in an innovative process of ensuring that competition is implemented on a level playing field. We have begun to see the benefits of expanded access to cellular phone services. We have also begun a number of initiatives to

facilitate public access to information via the Internet. This access is being provided via public telecentres located in post offices, public libraries and community centres. We are still at the stage of pilot projects, established in collaboration with UNDP and the University of the West Indies, and implemented by centres which participate in the Sustainable Development Networking Programme in Jamaica. At the same time, due to a public-private cooperation programme, all schools and teacher training colleges are being equipped with computers and the applicable training.

Jamaica was pleased to host recent regional meetings on e-government, organized with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Government of Italy and the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration, as well as on the use of information technology in disaster management, organized with UNDP. It is important that the results of meetings such as these be speedily implemented at national and regional levels.

My delegation encourages this meeting of the General Assembly to agree on defining policies which will support the bridging of the digital divide and increasing the capability of our citizens to exploit technologies for the development of our communities. As many developing countries still lack the basic infrastructure, we emphasize that this must be done through public-private partnerships involving all stakeholders.

We must not see information and communication technologies as isolated instruments, but rather as key elements in accelerating growth, raising competitiveness, promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty and facilitating the effective integration of all countries into the global economy, in accordance with the commitments contained in the Millennium Declaration.

We look forward to these issues being further addressed in the context of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and in the process leading up to next year's World Summit on the Information Society.

Mr. Mera (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, at the outset allow me to express the support of the Dominican Republic for the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China this morning.

On behalf of the Government of the Dominican Republic, led by President Hipólito Mejía, I extend a cordial greeting to all delegations present and especially thank the United Nations for convening this special meeting of the General Assembly dedicated to examining the role of information technology and communication in development.

The Dominican Republic has 8.8 million inhabitants and covers an area of 48,000 square kilometres. It occupies a strategic location — in the middle of the Caribbean Sea, in the Western Hemisphere — where it serves as a gateway to South America, Central America, Mexico, the United States, Canada and, naturally, to the ensemble of islands that constitute the Caribbean Community.

I am from a country that has enjoyed democratic stability for the last 40 years. That — combined with an economic development oriented towards the service sector, diversified manufacturing and high technology — makes it an attractive nation for foreign investment, along with a skilled environment in such important areas as that of telecommunications.

The Dominican Republic provides a very interesting case to analyse when dealing with the development of telecommunications. Telecommunications have been privatized for 72 years — since 1930. The State has no interests or participation in the sector through State companies offering telecommunication services. The liberalization of the sector has made possible the presence today of five companies, foreign and national, which, with their investments, have given the Dominican Republic one of the most advanced telecommunication infrastructures in Latin America. As of December 2001, our country has a telephone penetration rate of 25.4 per cent.

The robustness of the telecommunications sector, one of the most dynamic sectors of the Dominican economy, is due to the Government's comprehensive reform of the legislation regulating the telecommunication industry. With the cooperation from the International Telecommunication Union, the General Law on Telecommunications was approved on 27 May 1998. The law created the Dominican Institute of Telecommunications, the regulatory agency for the sector, with very clear and specific objectives: to promote universal service through the Telecommunications Development Fund; to regulate all

aspects of the radio spectrum in the country; to promote and to ensure the exercise of the rights of the users of telecommunication services; and to ensure the development of free and fair competition in the sector.

This labour was carried out following three basic principles: first, the principle of minimum regulation, which dictates that the State should intervene only when necessary; secondly, the principle of transparency, which requires that all actions and decisions of the regulatory body are open to examination by the general public in accordance with the due legal process; and thirdly, the principle of technological neutrality, which stipulates that the State should not dictate which technologies are to be adopted but should only ensure the quality of service offered to users.

With this union of responsibilities and cooperation shared between the public and private sector, the Dominican Republic is successfully moving towards meeting current and future challenges. That is why the Government has made its education policy one of its fundamental priorities, with the aim of ensuring that more than 2 million students in the country have access to the benefits of the Internet's information highway. In the Dominican Republic there are 400 information technology laboratories in the public schools, thanks to contributions from the private sector. As well, the Technological Institute of the Americas has the goal of training a labour force capable of manufacturing advanced technology products in the Cybernetic Park of Santo Domingo.

In order to narrow the digital divide, the Government of the Dominican Republic is carrying out through the Telecommunications Development Fund efforts ranging from the installation of rural public telephones to projects in telemedicine, tele-education and the installation of community telecentres. They make use of information technology and telecommunications to contribute to the strengthening of education and health in the country.

Despite the efforts made by the public and private sectors, among a population of approximately 2 million public students, there is an average of only one computer for every 350 students. We are therefore exploring the possibility of encouraging the transition from analogue television to digital television by 31 December 2006, since the penetration rate of television in my country and the rest of Latin America is greater than that of computers.

The right to knowledge is an inherent right of all citizens regardless of race, sex or economic status. Exclusion contributes to a sense of despair. That is the last thing we in developing countries want. We need to gain access to technology at a reasonable cost in order to expand our citizens' horizons in the information society, whether it be by means of computers, television or other electronic media.

That is why the Government of the Dominican Republic welcomes the convening of this meeting of the General Assembly and hopes that the World Summit on the Information Society scheduled for 2003 will make it possible to further unify the efforts of all countries in the search for mechanisms on content, for the respect of intellectual property rights and for the reduction of the digital divide.

The birth of the information society represents one of the most important challenges of the twenty-first century. I call for the unity of the telecommunications sector to face the challenge, which must be met by strengthening education, by establishing clear and transparent regulations enabling the greater competitiveness and the greater participation of the private sector, and by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by telecommunications and technology in building a better society favouring our collective well-being.

Mr. Jalang'o (Kenya): My delegation is delighted to participate in this General Assembly debate devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development at a time when access to and the transfer of knowledge of technology have become basic development requirements in both industrialized and developing countries.

My delegation fully endorses the statement made this morning by the Chairman of the G-77 on behalf of the G-77 and China. In this connection, I wish to underscore the importance of ICT as stated in the 2000 Havana Declaration, in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, in the Digital Opportunity Task Force mandated by the G-8, and in the speech made this morning by the President of Senegal on Africa's own home-grown initiative, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, and in the 2000 ministerial declaration of the Economic and Social Council.

All the aforementioned declarations and observations emphasize the important role of ICT. However, the real situation in the developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, confirms the existence of a wide digital divide, which must be seriously addressed.

More than 4 billion of the world's people are currently excluded from participating in or benefiting from the information revolution. It is true that ICT is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means to an end. We therefore welcome the establishment of the United Nations ICT Task Force, and we call upon it to liaise with other stakeholders in bridging the social and economic gaps that divide the South from the North and those within the South itself, and to suggest achievable and practicable approaches to the problem.

Kenya is preparing to leverage information technology in its national priorities of growth and poverty reduction and to strategically position itself for the global digital economy. Recent key actions include: mainstreaming information technology in the national planning and budgeting process by co-opting key stakeholders in policy and strategy development; partnering with the private sector for infrastructure improvements; and the Government's recent steps to substantially increase information technology in its own operations, particularly in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

The primary impetus for growth in information technology must come from private enterprise. Accordingly, the current plan envisages the role of government as primarily that of a facilitator for creating an enabling environment where the energies of the private sector and of civil society can be most effectively deployed. The Government's objective is to put in place a package of policy measures and incentives that will make Kenya one of the most attractive investment destinations. We note that the Internet and the availability of affordable computing solutions have reduced many of the geographic boundaries that formerly hindered the development of information and communication technologies.

The case for digital modernization is indeed compelling. It presents an opportunity for a country to benefit from the rapid growth of global connectivity and to leapfrog conventional obstacles to development goals, especially in poverty reduction. The focus is not so much on technology, but rather on using technology to improve the lives of people through its catalytic and leveraging effect on education and health interventions, on global markets and on market opportunities. It has thus become an indispensable tool in the fight against poverty by providing opportunities to support vital development goals far more effectively than conventional strategies.

The information technology industry is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in Kenya, and therefore we plan to provide affordable access, especially to underserved urban, rural and remote areas. Priority will thus be given to the deployment of a basic infrastructure; to universal access to citizens, including through publicly available facilities and complementary means; to education; to e-government; and to systems and Web content development. Our mission is to be at the forefront of the development and application of information technology in Africa and to promote an e-enabled society.

Infrastructure is perhaps the single most important overall e-community enabler for residents, businesses, health-care facilities and educational institutions to thrive in a digital economy and society. As the next generation of information technology unfolds, rural communities in particular face significant access challenges. Individual rural communities have little bargaining power with Internet providers. The Government will therefore explore ways to facilitate aggregation of demand by region to attract providers.

Many declarations and commitments have been made in the past decade without the slightest sign of being honoured. The most glaring example is the commitment made by world leaders during the World Food Summit, held at Rome in 1996, to reduce by half the number of undernourished people, which then stood at 800 million, by 2015. According to current statistics, the number of hungry people in the world has been reduced by only 6 million, instead of the goal of 22 million, per year.

As our leaders declared in Rome last week, we are not asking for alms. Africa is asking for a level playing field for trade issues, for the opening of markets, for the transfer of technology and for the removal of protectionist barriers as we continue to liberalize our economies as dictated by global trends.

We applaud the many initiatives currently being undertaken by United Nations agencies and by other

international organizations that are in partnership with the private sector to address the increasing information gap between industrialized and developing countries. We are ready to forge alliances and partnerships with all those organizations — including non-governmental organizations — as long as the partnerships do not undermine or weaken our positions in international policy-making processes. In that connection, we applaud the Italian Government's pilot initiatives on e-government in five developing countries — Albania, Jordan, Mozambique, Nigeria and Tunisia — and we appeal to other Group of Eight (G-8) members to provide funding to expand the programme to other African Governments in areas such as the media revolution.

As the preparatory process commences in Geneva in July 2002 for the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society — to be held in 2003 and 2005, respectively — my delegation appeals to the United Nations ICT Task Force to collaborate with other stakeholders for the rapid narrowing of the currently wide digital divide. We appeal for support in building the ICT infrastructure for reopening the gates to universal and equitable access and to human resource development.

Finally, it is through bridging the digital divide that currently separates us that the developing countries will be enabled to fight poverty, reduce the number of people who suffer from hunger and decrease the proportion of people who have no access to or cannot afford safe drinking water.

Mr. Gansukh (Mongolia): At the outset, my delegation would like to join the preceding speakers in expressing its deep appreciation to the President, for the timely convening of this high-level meeting devoted to one of the most pressing challenges of our time. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Economic and Social Council for bringing the issue of information and communication technologies for development into the agenda of the United Nations at the right time.

My delegation expresses its gratitude and appreciation to the Secretary-General for his thought-provoking and inspiring statement at the opening of today's meeting, as well as to the President of Senegal for his keynote address.

We fully associate ourselves with the statement made this morning by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and we express the hope that that it will serve as a basis for consideration of the various aspects of the issues on our agenda.

In addition, I would like to make the following brief comments.

Mongolia, like many other countries, believes that this special meeting is of great importance in addressing the challenges of the growing digital divide in the context of globalization and development. We expect that this meeting will promote coherence and synergy between various forms of ICT at the regional and international levels. It is also my delegation's hope that our meeting will make an appropriate contribution to preparations for the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society. That Summit is expected to address the wide range of issues concerning the effective and equitable growth of the information society, and to help shape a common vision and a comprehensive understanding of this societal transformation, with broader participation by representatives of public and private sectors as well as of non-governmental organizations.

From this perspective, Mongolia also attaches great importance to the various ICT initiatives under way — for example, the ICT Task Force and the Digital Opportunity Task Force created by the G-8 summit in Okinawa. Mongolia, together with other Member States, welcomed last November the formation of the United Nations ICT Task Force, as set out in the 2000 Millennium Declaration. The Task Force aims to contribute to the building of digital bridges for the two thirds of the world's population that has little or no access to the benefits of the digital revolution. It is a new body, and therefore, in my delegation's view, it would be premature to expect concrete results at this initial stage. However, the expansion of its membership to the broader international community would, in our view, be helpful in achieving its lofty goals. Furthermore, if the United Nations ICT Task Force assists Member States in the creation of national task forces and encourages cooperation among them, this would make its work more comprehensive.

The Mongolian Government attaches high priority to development of the ICT sector and is making every effort to mainstream ICT into its national policies as an important factor in its economic, social

and human development. The Mongolian Parliament approved in 2000 “The Concept of ICT Development in Mongolia for the period up to 2010”. The concept serves as the basis of the medium-term strategy for the development of ICT in Mongolia. The main objectives of the concept consist of defining a policy and legal framework; infrastructure development; human capacity-building; and business and private sector support. Each sub-topic covers a broad and complex set of policies, goals and measures. Mongolia has also established a national ICT Committee involving all stakeholders.

Within the framework of the specific goals just mentioned, during the past few years the Mongolian Government has taken some important measures in cooperation with international organizations. As a result of those measures, 91.3 per cent of the entire inter-urban network has been automated; transmission and switching facilities have been upgraded to modern digital technologies; and the capacity of fixed-telephone users has increased by 15 per cent. However, in Mongolia, a country with a vast territory, low population density and weak infrastructure development, the Government needs financial and technological assistance to realize the goals defined in the medium-term strategy. Moreover, my delegation believes that the experiences of some of the developing countries that have successfully developed and introduced ICT at the national level can serve as case studies for other developing nations. Mongolia is prepared to offer its experience for that purpose.

In conclusion, I would like to underline once again the importance that Mongolia attaches to this meeting, as well as to its two informal panel discussions, and to express my delegation’s readiness to work together in bringing our work to a successful conclusion and in implementing its follow-up activities.

Mr. Chiriboga (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, on behalf of the delegation of Ecuador, let me congratulate you, Sir, and express our certainty that your professionalism and leadership will enable this Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development to achieve concrete results for the benefit of our peoples.

The extraordinary evolution of information and communication technologies poses a challenge and at the same time offers one of the greatest opportunities our countries have ever had to overcome underdevelopment. It is our obligation to meet this challenge of destiny with statesmanship and foresight, ensuring the appropriate and intelligent use of this magnificent tool to overcome the barriers of underdevelopment and poverty.

The change is so defining in nature that we have left the confines of the industrial economy and arrived at an information society. The transfer of knowledge and information was always one of the greatest constraints on our development, since it prevented us from participating fully in the global economy. Information is vital to achieve progress in our societies, and today we have it at our disposal.

The President of Ecuador, Mr. Gustavo Noboa Bejarano, is convinced of the need to expand the use of ICT through the Internet to every part of Ecuador. He has repeatedly affirmed the need for our country to overcome all of its limitations and break down all barriers in order to make use of this tool. The President has said that an illiterate person today is not just someone who does not know how to read and write, but someone who cannot use computers.

Until just a few years ago, the Internet was the domain of a few academics. Today it is used even in the most remote villages of our countries. It is with profound satisfaction that I see the increasingly widespread use of the Internet in Ecuador, since I myself was involved in its establishment and launching there.

The Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, speaking on this subject, said that it was essential to bring these technologies to the 3 million human beings who have never even used a telephone. Nothing could be truer. If we want to take a leap past our constraints, if this vision of a world of connectivity can lead to an excellent education, a new base of knowledge and culture and a new way of producing and competing, we will have created jobs, wealth and well-being. We will have overcome poverty, which is one of the worst violations of human rights because it destroys hope and dooms human beings to despair.

The Secretary-General has steadily developed greater links between the United Nations and academic centres, technology companies and civil society, which should contribute to this effort. But I strongly believe that the effort must come from us. We must understand

that our peoples — with their enormous cultural traditions and universal values — can, despite the poverty and limitations to which they have been condemned by an unfair international system, overcome the barriers of protectionism to reach the levels of well-being to which they are entitled. The only way to do that is to use the tools of this new technology to leap to a new stage of development with the intelligence and knowledge they possess in abundance. I trust in the humanity of our peoples, and I look to this challenge with confidence that we will know how to use that new technology freely, transparently and with wisdom.

The potential of using electronics in medicine, education and trade is just emerging. We must make an effort to make sure that our peoples can be involved and so that they can understand that this vision of the future is not necessarily a form of slavery and hegemonic domination, but rather an opportunity afforded humankind by history.

When I see my own children and other young people use the Internet, I have trust in a better future. When we can create links of dialogue between peoples and cultures and when we can go beyond geographical differences of thousands of kilometres, to say nothing of prejudices, then I believe optimistically in a new era.

The heads of State or Government of the American hemisphere, gathered at Quebec, Canada, in April 2001, issued a declaration on connectivity that recognized the value of this tool in strengthening democracy and the progress of our peoples. I believe that we should examine and agree about the way in which the United Nations can lead the effort to open the way for less developed countries in this regard. But the United Nations must also be reformed to become a centre for the spread of information and communication technologies. We cannot allow this Organization of the peoples of the world to lag behind in technology as compared to other sectors. The United Nations must be a leader in the technological revolution, as it must essentially be used for the benefit of the human beings of the planet. We must give a human face to technology.

I would like to conclude with an invitation to reflect upon what has been said here about the enormous potential this subject holds for the future. We cannot accept the inertia with which we deal with matters involving our peoples. It is imperative that we promote, as soon as possible, a re-engineering of the hearts and minds of our peoples so as to take hold of the reins of our own destiny and utilize our immense capacities and human potential to meet the mandates of the Charter and to make the dream of a better future come true.

Mr. Hønningstad (Norway): The information revolution has changed our world in a fundamental way. In most developed countries the private and the public sector, as well as non-governmental organizations, have become dependent on global information flows and rely on cellular phones, satellite television and computers as indispensable tools for rapid access to information.

Developing countries should also have the opportunity to participate in the this modern information society. In part they do. There is hardly a single developing country without highly skilled people running web sites, information services and private information and communication technologies (ICT) enterprises. These are often young and enthusiastic people, but they are much fewer than they should be and they are often handicapped by limited bandwidth, scarce infrastructure and high prices. Developing countries are in need of both foreign investment and development assistance to address these disparities and to enhance their local capabilities.

One of the slogans at the demonstrations in Genoa, Italy, last summer, was that the hungry cannot eat computers. That reminds us that the fundamental problems of the developing world are still poverty, disease and illiteracy. Computers are just tools that can help us combat those conditions and, as tools, they require advanced skills and quite sophisticated supportive infrastructures. But with the right conditions and prerequisites in place, computers and other ICT equipment can be very powerful tools in helping us solve the more basic problems of development.

In our view, the main focus should continue to be the fight against poverty. But through concerted efforts by the international community to address the digital gap, and by integrating ICT into development cooperation, we will be able to combat poverty more effectively. However, poverty reduction is not necessarily about targeting the poor specifically. It is just as much about creating employment and economic surpluses that can be redistributed, which of course requires that social distributive policies be in place and

that Governments have an overall commitment to poverty eradication. ICT has the potential to create jobs, improve access to basic services and increase the sharing of information between people living in different parts of developing countries.

But access to this technology is still limited in most developing countries, and today we have heard good analyses and explanations about why that is so. One thing is sure: Governments, aided by donors, need to finance infrastructure and provide seed money and loans for information hubs.

The main principles of Norway's development policies for supporting the use of ICT in development strategies and in combating poverty are as follows. ICT should be regarded as a tool in reaching the Millennium Development Goals. It should be integrated wherever it is expedient and feasible. ICT should be integrated to support the main objectives of our development cooperation: social development, economic development and the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights in environmental and natural resource management and when it comes to women and gender equality. To make successful use of ICT, the partner countries must, through plans and analyses, recognize the benefit of, and possibilities inherent in, ICT as a tool for development.

We have initiated and participated in pilot studies regarding the use of ICT in development programmes in several countries, including Sri Lanka and Tanzania. Integrating ICT into our development programmes, in close cooperation with partner countries and multilateral organizations, will continue to be a high priority, because this is a field that requires good coordination among all actors. We will also continue to look at particular areas such as education, health and private sector development, and at applying a regional and country-specific focus to analyse more thoroughly the potential of ICT in development.

We know this meeting will make a substantial contribution to increasing our understanding of how to address the widening technological gap between richer and poorer countries. We also know that the result of these discussions will serve as useful input to the World Summit on the Information Society to be held in 2003 and 2005.

Mr. Kerim (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): The decision to convene a meeting of the General Assembly devoted to bridging the digital divide and promoting digital opportunities in the emerging information society, which was contained in resolution 56/258, was a clear confirmation of the central role of the United Nations, and in particular of the General Assembly, in the promotion of partnership in the context of globalization.

In convening the World Summit on the Information Society the United Nations has managed to grasp the opportunity to take the leadership role in promoting synergy and coherence among all efforts directed at expanding the development impact of information and communication technologies (ICT). The Government of the Republic of Macedonia considers this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to ICT to be a very important step in the preparatory process for the World Summit. It will help formulate strategies for the development of ICT and lend a truly global dimension to efforts to bridge the digital divide and to foster digital opportunity. Furthermore, ICT will firmly facilitate the development of the necessary strategies.

Taken together with two other summits — this year's International Conference on Financing for Development, which took place at Monterrey, Mexico, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, scheduled to take place at Johannesburg later in the year — the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held at Geneva in 2003 and at Tunis in 2005, can be regarded, in the context of globalization and the overall development process, as a landmark new approach in dealing with the challenges of today's world as well as in meeting the Millennium Summit goals.

The adoption of resolution 56/183 marked the beginning of the initial preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society, endorsing, inter alia, the leading role of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in the process. I should like to take this opportunity to endorse the report of the Secretary-General of the ITU on the ongoing preparatory process (A/57/71), particularly with regard to the proposed themes for the World Summit set out in paragraph 15 of that report.

During its coordination segment, the Economic and Social Council made an important contribution to identifying ways of enhancing the effectiveness of the Organization's role in promoting development with respect to access to and transfer of knowledge and

technology — especially ICT — through partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including the private sector. The forthcoming substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in New York will certainly focus attention on promoting the required dialogue among all actors, particularly within the Global Knowledge Partnership, in order to lay the foundations for a truly global and empowering knowledge and information society.

The principal mission of the United Nations ICT Task Force, as rightly pointed out by Secretary-General Annan, should be to spread ICT throughout the world and make its benefits accessible and meaningful to all of humanity. In supporting such an approach, my Government believes that the Task Force should provide a global forum for national, regional and international ICT for development issues through multi-stakeholder partnerships.

At the national level, ICT plays an indispensable role in creating a global knowledge-based economy, accelerating growth, raising competitiveness, promoting sustainable development, facilitating the integration of all countries into the global economy and, finally, eradicating poverty.

By overcoming many of the disadvantages of distance, information technology offers a huge opportunity to help marginalized regions to connect to the world economy. A landlocked country such as my own would surely have a comparative advantage in ICT-based service exports, such as software, data transcription and telemarketing, as against export-oriented manufactured goods. In that context, I would like to draw attention to the Republic of Macedonia's experience with ICT so far.

As a newly emerging democracy with a transitional economy, my country has opted for a development strategy based upon an advanced communication infrastructure. This infrastructure provides a sound basis for building a variety of information and communication services. In addition to the existing network and communication infrastructure, the main goal of ICT for development is to build web-based information systems in the following key areas: e-government, e-commerce, e-banking, distance education and health care, and the environment.

The President of the Republic of Macedonia, Boris Trajkovski, has launched an initiative entitled "E-Macedonia for all", with the aim of undertaking activities that will enable the country to become more closely integrated into the information society and the networked economy. In order to ensure the implementation of this initiative, the President has established a committee composed of experts in the areas of education, administration and banking, as well as representatives of computer companies. The committee has recently drawn up recommendations, in the form of an e-declaration, for the speedy development of an information society and a digital economy in the Republic of Macedonia as a matter of national priority. The recommendations contain, inter alia, proposals to establish a national agency for information technology; to prepare a national strategy for the development of an information society; to draw up legislative measures and instruments for standardizing ways of saving, exchanging and using electronic data; to provide tax relief for retail businesses engaged in e-commerce; and to introduce web domains and e-mail addresses for companies and institutions at the national level.

The fact that 45 per cent of science and technology parks worldwide are engaged in information and communication or related technologies is an important indicator in the evaluation of the role of ICT among new and emerging technologies. The rapid advances that are being made in new and emerging technologies in such fields as information, telecommunications, the environment, clean energy, health care, materials and transportation, as well as the increasing pace of globalization, are imposing a new social and ethical responsibility on the scientific and technological community — the responsibility to direct applications of these new developments in ways that strengthen efforts to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

The past decade has been marked by two extraordinary developments whose impact and implications are still being digested. At the political level, democracy — understood both as a system of government and as a value system commanding the support of ordinary people — has expanded greatly throughout the world. Simultaneously, spurred by major new developments in ICT, the ways in which people and societies can, and do, relate to each other are being rapidly transformed. The ethical dimension of science and technology should not, therefore, be neglected in our deliberations on ICT.

In that respect, I consider it appropriate to quote the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Koichiro Matsuura, who stated:

> "In the digital age, equality in terms of the dignity and rights of all human beings requires that ever-greater vigilance and protection be exercised against the propagation of all forms of violence and aggression and against incitement to racism, xenophobia and all other types of behaviour that infringe human rights."

Let that message form the core of the guidelines for the preparatory process for the World Summit on the Information Society.

The importance of ICT to the process of globalization, and especially the linkages among trade, finance, investment and development, cannot be overemphasized. In recent years, the consistency and focus with which the General Assembly has been addressing the issue of globalization in all its complexity testify to its determination to advance the debate from a general understanding of the nature of globalization and its policy implications, through addressing its major individual components, such as ICT, to a comprehensive and integrated analysis aimed at producing action-oriented decisions and recommendations.

Globalization has made the task of pursuing development even more complex than before, primarily because of the increasing interaction among various characteristic components. Precisely for that reason, it is necessary to ensure coherence and complementarity between the Plan of Implementation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development on one hand, and the use of ICT for development on the other. This must become one of the key issues for the United Nations system and its agencies, and especially for the General Assembly in its future activities.

Mr. Paolillo (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a member of the Group of 77 and China, Uruguay endorses the statement made this morning by the Vice-Minister for Science and Technology of Venezuela on behalf of the group.

The revolution in information technology is taking place in world that is so deeply divided that its impact varies greatly from place to place. In the industrialized countries, the new information technologies act as an engine of economic growth, social development and higher standards in the fields of education, culture and the arts. The developing countries, on the other hand, lack the resources that would allow them to participate effectively in the information society. For them, the spread of the new information and communication technologies (ICT) poses a two-fold challenge. On one hand, developing countries have limited access to these new technologies, which constitute the core of a new way of global organization. This has created a digital divide at the international level that threatens to accentuate even further the marginalization of their populations and their economies. The percentage of Internet users on the two sides of this divide speaks for itself: between 33 and 50 per cent in the industrialized countries and only 0.4 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.

Moreover, owing to differences in access to the new technologies among social sectors in developing countries, there is an internal digital divide within their societies that has both social and productive dimensions. Each State, therefore, has a responsibility to incorporate into their national development strategies programmes aimed at ensuring that the new information technologies contribute to the attainment of development goals, by mainstreaming them into, inter alia, their educational, scientific, health, economic and political systems. States also have the responsibility to establish transparent legal and regulatory frameworks and to introduce appropriate policies that enable all sectors of society, and particularly those with the least resources, to access the new technologies.

But just as State action at the national level is crucial, it is also necessary to ensure the effective participation and cooperation of international organizations and financial institutions and the firm commitment of the national and international private sector and of scientific and academic circles. The United Nations must play a key role in promoting synergy among all stakeholders, including the private sector, by coordinating national efforts and playing a leadership role in helping developing countries to obtain maximum benefits from the use of modern information and communication tools.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, some Governments have launched initiatives to provide Internet access to the lowest-income sectors through

schools and community centres. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean started out in 1998 with less than 1 per cent of the population connected to the Internet. That figure then rose significantly, and we are currently the fastest-growing Internet community in the world.

The countries of the region have been working together since June 2000, when at the initiative of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Government of Brazil, they met in Brazil to prepare their participation in the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council on development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century. At that meeting, it was agreed that by the year 2005 the countries of the region would be full-fledged members of an information society characterized by efficiency, equity and sustainability, within a global knowledge-based economy.

In order to ensure continuity in the debate on the subject, the first Latin American and Caribbean information and communications technology workshop was held on the island of Margarita, Venezuela, in November 2000. The workshop identified common needs for project formulation and approved four regional programmes in the areas of health, e-commerce, e-government and school Internet connectivity for education. This last programme, which is coordinated by Uruguay, seeks to establish, coordinate and supervise a comprehensive programme to promote access by children to the information society through public schools in all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

At the workshop, Governments urged the international organizations in attendance, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the Andean Development Corporation, to continue to support national and regional initiatives aimed at fully integrating the region into the information society. The coordination of activities in this field is undertaken by the IADB, ECLAC and the Governments of the region, in the framework of the United Nations ICT Task Force.

Uruguay is the country in Latin America that has the highest percentage of computers in the home — 19 per cent — and we have become a pioneer country for the effective integration of the information society with the economic and social development of the country. This has been done through the establishment of institutions at the highest level, including Uruguay en Red — Uruguay on the Net. With this institution, which comes directly under the Office of the President of the Republic, the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, participate in an active and coordinated way in the incorporation and development of information technologies in key areas, with the objective, inter alia, of bridging the digital divide, improving business competitivity, enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the public sector and increasing connectivity.

Uruguay en Red represents a well-organized and effective institutional model whose starting point is the development of a strategy for the information society, with a view to implementing concrete measures of institution-building and putting in place projects and pilot programmes to demonstrate the application of information technologies in various spheres of development. This model is currently being used successfully in other Latin American and Caribbean countries in the framework of operational activities of the IADB.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize the need for serious commitment to measures to bridge the international and national digital divide. We believe that this commitment is essential if we are to attain the Millennium Development Goals. We appreciate the work of the Economic and Social Council, which put the issue of information and communication technologies on the United Nations agenda, and we welcome the establishment of the ICT Task Force and the adoption of its plan of action.

With their invaluable assistance, Governments, multilateral institutions, the donor community, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders must all work hard in the preparatory process for the Summit on the Information Society in order to promote immediate access by all countries and citizens of the world to information, knowledge and communication technologies in the service of development.

Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the President on his leadership in the preparation of this timely and important meeting. My delegation fully associates itself with the statement made by the Chair of the Group of 77 and China.

Ethiopia welcomes the convening of the meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development. We hope that it will enable the international community once again to emphasize the leadership role that the United Nations system should play in promoting synergy and coherence among all efforts directed at expanding the development impact of information and communication technologies. The launching of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force was a first step in this direction.

It is widely recognized that information and communication technologies play an important role in the development efforts of developing countries. Indeed, access to, and dissemination of, modern technology has the potential to increase the pace of development far beyond what we have witnessed in the past. There have been two previous major technological revolutions that dramatically changed the welfare of the human race. The first one was the industrial revolution, and the second was the green revolution in agriculture. In our view, the advances in information and communication technologies constitute the third and latest technological revolution.

As was the case with the first advances in technological innovations, information and communication technologies remain highly concentrated in the developed economies, thus creating a huge digital divide between the developed and the developing countries. In fact, I have just come from chairing a panel at which the point was made, and accepted, that the question is not always that of a divide between countries. Indeed, within all countries — including the least developed, such as mine — there are elites, and the divide is actually not that great between them and the elites of the developed countries. But there are sectors within society itself, even in the developed economies, in which the digital divide is actually quite large — relatively the same as one would find in the developing or least developed countries. How to bridge this gap will therefore constitute one of the focal areas for the international community.

ICT can play an important role in the integration of the developing countries into the global economy. Thanks to advances in ICT, access to, and diffusion of, knowledge and production techniques have never been easier. In the case of the African continent, therefore, the promotion of ICT is for the purpose not only of bridging the digital divide, but also of enabling the long-delayed transfer of science and technology. Indeed, during the opening meeting this morning, President Wade made a case for this when he spoke of the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

The Secretary-General himself stated in his report to the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in 2001 that the ICT revolution does indeed provide the opportunity to leapfrog stages of technological development.

Ethiopia has launched an information and communication technologies capacity-building programme. We have a national road map for ICT development efforts, with the ultimate goal of establishing nationwide connectivity, in partnership with the United Nations system. In order to bring about this development at the grass-roots level, Internet points are planned that will facilitate district-level development activities, with an emphasis on women and children. I am sure that the Ambassador of Jamaica will be very happy about that. The emphasis on children in particular we believe to be important, since we are talking also about technologies of the future.

If developing countries are fully to participate in the knowledge-based global economy, there is an urgent need to bridge the digital divide. Tapping into information and communication technologies in turn requires the active participation of all stakeholders, including, most importantly, the private sector. It is therefore imperative to forge partnerships with civil society stakeholders. Such partnerships, we believe, should also have a strong development dimension.

In conclusion, we hope that this meeting of the General Assembly on information and communication technologies will provide valuable inputs for the international community's preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in December 2003 in Geneva and December 2005 in Tunis. These meetings, we hope, will focus on concrete actions and programmes geared towards integrating the peoples in the developing countries into the knowledge-based global economy.

In order to help to conclude this afternoon's meeting, I have cut out various parts of my statement. However, the text of the entire statement can be found on the Ethiopian web site.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.