FROM DIGITAL DIVIDE TO GLOBAL DIGITAL SOLIDARITY

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Abstract

The first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, 10-12 December, 2003) proved to be a diplomatic success and a genuine "venue of opportunity". This was the most important political event dedicated to the Information Society since the European Commission coined the title phrase in the mid-Nineties. A total of 11047 participants representing 1486 entities were registered for the Summit, including a unique meeting of leaders, policy-makers, ICT business people, voluntary and non-governmental organizations of every possible kind, and top-level thinkers and speakers. The three-days of Plenary meetings and high-level roundtables were supplemented by nearly 300 side-events meant to bringing the dream of an inclusive information society one-step closer to reality.

Negotiators from 192 countries had resolved during several preparatory meetings most of their disagreements over draft documents presented to Heads of State and Government. Following eleventh hour discussions, sticking points such as references to human rights, media freedom, intellectual property rights and Internet governance were overcome.

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The globe's political and ICT leaders discussed the digital divide between the worlds's rich and poor. One focus of the conference was to find ways to boost Internet and mobile phone penetration in developing nations.

The Summit declared itself fully aware that the benefits of the information technology revolution are today unevenly distributed between the developed and developing countries and within national societies. It formulated the commitment to turning this digital divide into a digital opportunity for all, particularly for those who risk being left behind and further marginalized. The final conclusion of Declaration of Principles adopted by consensus and entitled Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium was that we were collectively entering a new era of enormous potential, that of the Information Society and expanded human communication. In this emerging society, information and knowledge can be produced, exchanged, shared and communicated through all the networks of the world. All individuals can soon together build a new Information Society based on shared knowledge and founded on global solidarity and a better mutual understanding between peoples and nations. These measures will open the way to the future development of a true knowledge society.

For achieving that objective it is necessary to seek and effectively implement concrete international approaches and mechanisms, including financial and technical assistance. Therefore, while appreciating ongoing ICT cooperation through various mechanisms, the Summit invited all stakeholders to commit to the "Digital Solidarity Agenda" set forth in the Plan of Action. The worldwide agreed target is to contribute to bridge the digital divide, promote access to ICTs, create digital opportunities, and benefit from the potential offered by ICTs for development.

Consequently, the Summit recognized the will expressed by some States to create an international voluntary "Digital Solidarity Fund", and by others to undertake studies concerning existing mechanisms and the efficiency and feasibility of such a Fund. In fact, the minimal consensus was in favour of global digital solidarity, but there was no agreement on the actual creation of a special fund or on other modalities of action. Therefore, a cogent and topical appeal was addressed to all political leaders of the world to enter into forging a 'unity of purpose' in aiming to achieve universal access to ICT. If that appeal does not become operational, the remaining digital gap will widen.

The second phase of the Summit is scheduled in Tunis, on November 16 -18, 2005.

1. A Phenomenal Diagnosis

At the end of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society - WSIS - (Geneva, 10-12 December, 2003), the participants adopted by consensus The Declaration of Principles entitled ***Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium***. This document articulates a common vision of the key values that should serve as the foundation for the emerging information society. By the same procedure, the Summit adopted The Plan of Action which sets out time-bound development targets aimed at extending access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) to all. Its first paragraph states that "The Information Society envisaged in the Declaration of Principles will be realized in cooperation and solidarity by governments and all other stake-holders."(1)

The UN system faced on that occasion a test of its capacity for promoting global solidarity during an original diplomatic WSIS scheduled in two phases: in Geneva (2003) and in Tunisia (16-18 November 2005). As a host country, Switzerland envisioned an innovative Summit bringing together all actors able to make a real contribution to the development of a global information society. As such, inclusion was considered the guiding principle for the Summit's preparatory work.

The WSIS brought together heads of state, executive heads of UN agencies, non-governmental organisa-tions, civil society entities, industry leaders and media representatives. They attempted to foster a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action to shape the future of the global information society and to promote the urgently needed access of all countries to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development. Some 1,600 participants attended the preparatory meetings for the WSIS in Geneva in 2003. They were urged to move from input to impact in working towards the construction of a real world summit of solidarity. But on what background?

Adama Semasekou, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the WSIS, stated that new information and communication technologies over the past few years had changed the way in which people learned and worked. It had also upset traditional political, economic and social structures and made considerable changes to culture and education. In the information society, people can process and spread information orally and visually with no limits on time, distance or volume.

Many thought that the information society would spur on economic and social development, and mean a new distribution of jobs and wealth. It seemed to be a promise of progress for all of humanity, but the information society actually did not lead to benefits for the majority of mankind. Rich

countries made up 91 per cent of Internet users, while most of the South was encountering problems in connecting and surfing on the Internet.

How could the international community develop a shared vision of the information society, combat the digital divide and include the South in development? It was to answer those questions that the United Nations had decided to convene the WSIS to develop a universal vision and shared understanding of the information society.

Much has been achieved by humankind in the fields of science and technology since the beginning of history. The advances of the last century and their dynamics are impressive. But what is really amazing is the contrast between the material progress reserved for a few and the ever increasing backwardness in the development of humanism and solidarity. The number of those who are not yet acquainted with the telephone is higher than the total of the world population when commercial telephone services were established. Those who barely survive today in the most abject poverty are much more numerous than those who inhabited the earth the day the United Nations was born in 1945 with its unfulfilled promises of peace and freedom.

In 2001, the countries with the highest income concentrated 73% of Internet users and 95.5% of the computers connected to it. But, in addition, the digital divide creates new contrasts within countries, including the richest ones, where those marginalized also abound. By 2002, it was estimated that only 2.4% of humankind acceded to Internet, while between 50 and 60% struggled against poverty. (2)

The public enemy No.1 among the new headaches of developing countries is the digital divide which refers to the gap that exists between those who have and those who don't have access to technology like computers and Internet as well as related services. Experts point their finger at the digital divide as the main threat, which may tear communities apart.

Presently, digital information is like air. Without breathing fresh air, one cannot live. To help those who live with thin air, the society must embrace such people by crashing the digital divide. Otherwise our society might be exposed to collapse. The digital divide can be witnessed at every standard, including sex, age, education background, region and income.

Until the middle of the 1990s, the discrepancy of access to computer and Internet, as information gap, was expected to be brought under control easily. However, actually the gap widened gradually beyond expectation and the terms digital divide emerged to express the doggedness of the problem. The expression digital divide mirrors the fact that the break between

information haves and have-nots is structural and it is a tough job to find a quick fix to bridge the difference.

Up to now, the digital divide was mainly about access to the Internet or digital information. However, new aspects of the digital divide, - extended digital divide and international information gap - began to appear as fat blips on the high-tech radar. So far the digital divide meant whether one can go online or not. But in the future the term will be about how well one can make use of information properly. Figures vary. 91% of Internet Access are concentrated around 19% of world population. There are more telephone lines in Manhattan than there are in the entire sub-Saharan Africa combined. With a population of 250,000 inhabitants, Iceland has 4 times more Internet hosts than India whose population is close to a billion people.

The different economic and sociological studies on the digital gap made it possible to conclude that the latter encourages the diminution of opportunities, intellectual poverty, economic setbacks and mostly it keeps cultures and civilizations apart. Information technology has been proclaimed as the icon of the current age, but it doesn't touch everybody's lives. "Despite all utopian dreams, the Information Age has so far touched only a tiny majority of the world's population," wrote Kenneth Keniston and Deepak Kumar in *IT Experience in India*, published by Sage (www.indiasage.com). "If we define household access to the World Wide Web as a criterion for joining the Information Age, less than 5 per cent of the world's population of 6 billion had gained access by the year 2002."

Therefore, there is an urgent need to bridge the divide. But there are "four digital divides", not just one: "The first is internal - between the digitally-empowered rich and the poor. The second is a linguistic-cultural gap between English and other languages and between 'Anglo-Saxon culture' and other world cultures. The next gap is underscored by disparities in access to information technology and between rich and poor nations. Finally, there is the phenomenon of the 'digerati'. This is an affluent elite possessing the appropriate skills and means to take advantage of the ICTs."

There are daunting statistics: only 1 per cent of India's population has home access to computers; of that, only a half has Net facility; more than 40 per cent of the one billion are illiterate; one in two newborns is below ideal birth weight; and only around 3 per cent can afford a telephone. Priorities could be different: With 60 million Indian children not in school, "for the cost of a computer, you can have a school."

Reverting to the divides, the Indian authors ask the legitimate question: how do we bridge them? By committing to that goal "the same intelligence and imagination that have gone into

creating the technologies themselves." A simple reminder that nothing is impossible, nor any chasm that is uncrossable. (3)

In diplomatic fora, India recognized science and technology as critical determinants of development and advocated for the continued quick pace of knowledge-led growth. Indian institutions focused on improving the quality of science and technology and promoting education and training. Indian government increased investment in research and development substantially in the last 50 years, from $2 million in the early 1960s to $2 billion in 1996. In the next few years, India will earmark 2 per cent of gross domestic product for research and development. Still, those efforts represented a mere fraction of science and technology needs. Developed countries could and should fund more scientific research, and should fulfil their commitments stipulated in Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Action to transfer technology to developing nations. According to the 2000 Human Development Report, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries spent $520 billion on research and development and owned 91 per cent of the 347,000 patents issued in 1998. India estimated that the cost of technology transfer to developing countries had risen sharply due to intellectual property rights regimes and called for reducing those costs to ensure the widespread dissemination of knowledge and technology. (4)

That situation was precisely what the World Summit on the Information Society was expected to remedy. Attention at the highest political level was needed for that problem, and a concerted plan of action had to be conceived. The Summit managed to bring together all relevant participants -– States, international organizations, the private sector and civil society -– to forge a global consensus and collective will to reap the full benefits of the technological revolution. Paragraph 17 of the Summit's Declaration is crystal-clear in that regard: **"We recognize** that building an inclusive Information Society requires new forms of solidarity, partnership and cooperation among governments and other stakeholders, i.e. the private sector, civil society and international organizations. Realizing that the ambitious goal of this Declaration—bridging the digital divide and ensuring harmonious, fair and equitable development for all—will require strong commitment by all stakeholders, we call for digital solidarity, both at national and international levels."

2. Is Cure Possible?

A small country, Suriname, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), stated that science and technology formed the engine of sustainable human development and economic growth. Its various sources

could help create competitive advantage and wealth, and ultimately lead to improved quality of life. Developing countries needed the necessary knowledge, practical skills and infrastructure of science and technology to benefit from globalization and to avoid marginalization. They urgently needed to bridge the digital divide. Areas most likely to be affected by scientific and technological advancements were poverty reduction, universal education, economic growth, delivery of public information and governance. The international community should promote measures for transferring technology to developing countries, particularly through foreign direct investment. In that regard, technical cooperation should be concentrated on technological capacity-building, offering countries the opportunity to use intellectual property rights to advance national systems of innovation. (5)

In the same spirit, Egypt said the United Nations work in science and technology marked the beginning for meeting the Millennium Goal of bridging the digital divide between developing and developed countries. The information revolution was the best vehicle for advancement in all areas of life.

During the preparatory process, Brazil reminded that the Summit should seriously address the digital divide by supporting the efforts of all developing countries to tap into the potential of the ICT. International cooperation was vital in bridging the digital divide. The potential for North-South and South-South cooperation was vast and still unexplored. Developed and developing countries, international institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector should join efforts in promoting the transfer of technology, investments in infrastructure and capacity-building.

Tunisia, as host country of the WSIS in 2005, cogently reminded that the weapon of the future was knowledge. Scientific and technological research continued to be a major contributor to the development process. The United Nations was the ideal forum to find solutions to the digital divide, which continued to separate people worldwide. The International Labour Organization, expressing itself as a UN specialized agency, welcomed and fully endorsed the World Summit hoping it would lead to strategies to bridge the digital divide.

As pointed out by Romania, the unprecedented development of information technology had led to fundamental changes at the economic, social and cultural levels, both nationally and internationally. Switzerland said ICT could be a catalyst for economic growth, play a part in good governance and better everyone's living standards by providing access to knowledge or new services. The ICT had the potential to open up entire communities that were isolated from the rest of the world, and

re-establish links between societies and their disadvantaged communities. Its potential had been recognized for some years and several initiatives had been undertaken to put technologies to work for development. That plethora of initiatives, however, had not found a focal point and potential synergy had been left unexploited.

Consequently, the main objective of the WSIS was to take measures to reduce the digital divide. That could not be achieved instantly in December 2003, but may gradually get tangibility. In this regard, the World Economic Forum held in Davos in January 2004 was encouraging. Computer giant Microsoft has signed a one billion dollar agreement with UNDP. This five-year plan is aimed at bridging the digital divide in developing countries, starting with Egypt, Morocco and Mozambique.

All the studies, reports and documents published by the UN General Assembly and relevant UN bodies reaffirmed the need to fulfil the technological requirements of developing countries, through negotiation with the private sector and computer giants. That meant enabling developing countries to obtain products at reasonable prices and create information technology infrastructure.

However, bridging the digital divide in developing countries means more than setting up computer centers in remote areas. For the amount of money to be spent, simply setting up ICT centers will require high capital costs and would have insignificant long term effects. Costs will include real estate purchase or rental, equipment purchase and recurring administrative costs for technical and administrative staff.

While in some cases ICT centers might be the answer, a more interesting idea is to spend the money to create Internet literacy at a much wider scale. This can be done by supporting hitherto unnoticed phenomena in developing countries. Inexpensive and accessible Internet cafes can today be found in every corner of the world. In one street alone in the Jordanian northern city of Irbid a world record of 130 cafes exist. These well attended Internet cafes, often created by young entrepreneurs can be more cost effective than the traditional system of creating ICT centers. Their private nature lends them to longer hours and the public at-large will be less worried about governmental supervision than they would in government-run computer centers. These Internet cafes can easily adapt themselves to the local and cultural needs of their own society. In order to create wide spread Internet literacy and pave the way towards e-government, developing countries need to have many much more Internet users than at present. This increase needs not to be quantitative but qualitative. (6)

Eliminating the digital divide can never happen unless local and

international institutions, both governmenttal and non-governmental, put more time and money into creating content on the Internet.

Professor Johan Galtung asserted in this regard with a sense of vision the following:

"We must reinvent the concept of the commons at a global level, and establish some kind of global welfare society that would furnish a safety net for every woman, child and man on the planet. Only then could we look upon the idea of globalization with any sense of satisfaction. If our civilization is to command any respect from the coming generations it can leave no one on the outside looking in. The global communications revolution could certainly assist in this larger revolution, which is much more noble and heroic than anything humanity has ever attempted before, and certainly goes far beyond the idea of a market economy". (7)

Internet governance was one of the most controversial issues at December 2003 Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. Yet, the keenly felt differences over the subject did not get in the way of overall progress. The Summit was able to produce results in the framework of broader efforts to put information and communication technologies at the service of development. Nonetheless, on Internet governance the differences were such that the Summit asked the UN Secretary-General to set up a working group on Internet governance whose mission includes developing a working definition of Internet governance, identifying the relevant public policy issues, and developing a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society. (8)

3. Under What Conditions?

Internet governance remains one of the most difficult issues, in particular while dealing with its future regime. Yet, on 26 March 2004 the current system of Internet governance was considered to be working well, and the question was how to better coordinate the work of specialized bodies and ensure the involvement of all stakeholders. That was a topic considered during the Global Forum on Internet Governance, held on 25 and 26 March 2004 and organized by the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force. It was attended by more than 200 leaders from government, business and civil society. Participants included officials from developing and developed countries, as well as private-sector personalities such as Paul Twomey, President and CEO of the Internet Corporation for Assigned

Names and Numbers (ICANN) and two "fathers of the Internet", Vinton Cerf, Vice-President of MCI and Robert Kahn of the Corporation for National Research Initiatives.

The Forum was intended to contribute to worldwide consultations to prepare the ground for a future working group on Internet governance to be established by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, which is to report to the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to be held in Tunis in 2005, as indicated earlier in the present study.

Mr. Annan, addressing the Forum on 25 March, said the issues were numerous and complex, but the world had a common interest in ensuring the security and dependability of the Internet. Equally important, inclusive and participatory models of Internet governance should be developed. The medium had to be made accessible and responsive to the needs of the world's people. Its current reach was highly uneven, and the vast majority of the world's people had yet to benefit from it. (9)

In the near future a working group on Internet governance will be established, as requested in December 2003 by the WSIS. But before doing so, there was a need to consult a broad cross-section of the communities involved. The views emerging at the Global Forum and other consultations were expected to help to frame the issues, find areas of convergence and identify issues for future consultations. Once these consultations took place, the Secretary-General would be in a position to establish the working group, which would be open, transparent and inclusive.

The same principles would also apply to the task force on funding that the Summit had asked him to create, Mr. Annan said. This body, to be established shortly, would review the adequacy of current funding approaches and consider new funding mechanisms that might strengthen efforts to bridge the digital divide. Various private-sector participants reminded the Forum that "if it works don't fix it", that "the best governance is the least governance", and that ICANN was making good progress in becoming more transparent and inclusive. What were needed were further negotiations in specialized bodies. But some developing countries felt that the current system did not involve them enough, and reflected a crisis of legitimacy not just in Internet governance but in global governance. Vinton Cerf, senior Vice-President of MCI and "one of the fathers of the Internet" according to ICT Task Force Chair Jose-Maria Figueres Olsen, said the Internet had developed openly and freely, without much governmental or other oversight, because its technical rules had been developed openly and adopted voluntarily. The very openness of the Internet design had fuelled its evolution, as participants in its

operations and development had been able to contribute new ideas and applications.

As the Internet continued to evolve, it had begun to incorporate functions that had long been the subject of considerable regulations, and this had raised the question whether it needed more governing, Mr. Cerf said. But more important were the uses to which the Internet was put. If there was a need to govern, one should focus more on the use and abuse of the network, and less on its operations. What kind of governance was necessary?

Governance should be thought of as the steps taken collectively to facilitate the spread, development and collective use of the Internet, Mr. Cerf said. For instance, e-commerce could be promoted by adopting international procedures for the use of signatures, mechanisms to settle disputes of international electronic transactions, treatment of international transaction taxes and protection of intellectual property.

Internet use could help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the areas of poverty reduction, education and health care, the environment and gender equality. The Forum should weave together these objectives by asking how the Internet community could facilitate the constructive use of the Internet.

Engineers used to say, "If it isn't

broken don't fix it", and doctors "First do no harm". The technical aspects of the Internet were evolving very openly in forums open to all. Rules for Internet use were less well developed and deserved more consideration. "I would caution, however, that one should strive not to stifle the innovation and freedom to create that the Internet offers", Mr. Cerf said. There were many places at the Internet table- a grand collaboration of many entities in all sectors. The task was to assure that all who may benefit have a seat at the table and an opportunity to contribute to its evolution.

Paul Twomey, President and CEO of ICANN, said his organization was a national, multi-stakeholder body coordinating Internet systems of unique identifiers. The ICANN's meetings focused on technical problems, were open to all, and the ICANN community welcomed all stakeholders. The mandate of ICANN was similar to that the WSIS had required for the Working Group to be established by the Secretary-General.

Richard McCormack, honorary Chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), said there were 850 million Internet users, twice as many as in 2000, and stressed the need to focus on areas where government intervention was necessary. The Working Group on Internet Governance should be a steering committee rather than a normative body, and should contribute to the expansion of the

Internet in both developing and developed countries.

A Brazilian delegate stressed the Internet was "increasingly seen as an international public utility that should be managed very broadly". Internet governance should not be the prerogative of one group of countries or stakeholders, and the specific roles of all stakeholders should be defined. Governments also had a stake, and the concerns of developing countries should be taken into account.

"It is true that many issues are technical, but technology is not outside of politics," said the representative of South Africa's National Commission on Information Society and Development. The issue was not that something was broken and should be fixed. The issue was rather legitimacy of the process, and this is why developing countries had brought the issue of Internet governance to the United Nations, "which we feel represents us".

Other speakers reminded that the issue of Internet governance related to the greater global governance issue. Developing countries had concerns with global bodies such as the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the international financial institutions. There were global governance concerns, if not a global governance crisis. On the other hand, there was an increasingly overlapping of interests among different stakeholders rather than a North-South

divide. "In many developing countries, the concerns of civil society are the same as those of the private sector." Some representatives noted that the meeting had been an example of the coming "global polity" that would be necessary to tackle major geo-political, economic and environmental challenges. Global polity involved bringing together all stakeholders in a broad dialogue, and the Economic and Social Council Chamber hosting the meeting was a symbol of it. Used in the past to host statements by political leaders only, the Chamber during the Forum had hosted addresses by many different stakeholders, representing the global society, who had came together to express opinions and define policies. There was no need to govern or regulate what works, the Swiss representative said. The system worked, ICANN worked, and there was rather a need to concentrate on specific issues such as property rights, e-commerce, privacy, contract law and Internet security, while defining what should be the role of governments.

Markus Kummer, a Swiss diplomat who had coordinated the final negotiations for the outcome documents of WSIS, said the Forum needed to focus on defining the right modalities of the process ahead. The working group on Internet governance should be totally independent and not affiliated to any United Nations body; should be transparent, involving all stakeholders and giving them equal access; and should focus on gathering facts and

making recommendations. It should be a small group, perhaps with a two or three-tier system so as to fully include governments and allow developing countries to make their voices heard. The working group should start "by deciding who does what", then define the issues to be dealt with.

The Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette in her remarks at the closing session of the Global Forum on Internet Governance in New York, 26 March 2004 stated that the event had provided another opportunity to improve the grasp of the many issues that fall under the rubric of Internet governance, to clarify the positions of the many stakeholder groups, and to discover areas of common ground.

The complexity of Internet governance was clearly highlighted at this Global Forum. A number of issues were identified where there was need for international cooperation to develop globally acceptable solutions (for instance Spam, network security, privacy and information security). It was also highlighted that content should be culturally and linguistically relevant and, from a technical viewpoint, language standards ought to be rapidly developed and interoperable within the Internet infrastructure.

During the meeting an offer was advanced to develop a matrix of all issues of Internet governance addressed by multilateral institutions, including gaps and concerns, to assist the

Secretary-General in moving forward the agenda on these issues.

The participants stressed the principles of transparency and of building on existing institutions and mechanisms to enhance legitimacy and participation of developing countries in policy making forums.

A strong message of the meeting was the importance of addressing issues from the development perspective, and of ensuring that the benefits of the Internet contribute to the cause of human development. ICTs–particularly the Internet– can play a vital role in contributing to the Millennium Development Goals.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his remarks at the opening session of the Global Forum on Internet Governance stated that in only a few years, the Internet has revolutionized trade, health, education and, indeed, the very fabric of human communication and exchange. Moreover, its potential is far greater than what was seen in the relatively short time since its creation. In managing, promoting and protecting its presence in our lives, we need to be no less creative than those who invented it. Clearly, there is a need for governance, but that does not necessarily mean that it has to be done in the traditional way, for something that is so very different.

The issues are numerous and complex. Even the definition of what is

meant by Internet governance is a subject of debate. But the world has a common interest in ensuring the security and dependability of this new medium. Equally important, people need to develop inclusive and participatory models of govern-ance. The medium must be made accessible and responsive to the needs of all. At present, its reach is highly uneven, and the vast majority of people have yet to benefit from it, or even to be touched by it at all.(10) Large visibility must be given to these efforts, and all stake-holders should be able to contribute in this open participatory process. It is with this objective in mind that an online forum is offered on wsis-online.net to host contributions from all willing stake-holders. (11)

Participation in the online forum is open to any individual or organization concerned with Internet governance and willing to contribute to the debate in a constructive way. Forum archives will be freely accessible. In addition a UN ICT Task Force as a multi-stakeholder initiative was launched by the Secretary-General in 2001. In supporting the first phase of the World Summit, the Task Force successfully helped in placing the United Nations development objectives at the heart of the Summit and mobilized the participation of the multi-stakeholder networks, organized a series of side events and launched new initiatives, including on education. (12)

4. Money is not enough

Paragraph 61 of the Declaration of Principles adopted by the WSIS states: "In order to build an inclusive global Information Society, we will seek and effectively implement concrete inter-national approaches and mechanisms, including financial and technical assistance. Therefore, while apprecia-ting ongoing ICT cooperation through various mechanisms, we invite all stakeholders to commit to the "Digital Solidarity Agenda" set forth in the Plan of Action. We are convinced that the worldwide agreed objective is to contribute to bridge the digital divide, promote access to ICTs, create digital opportunities, and benefit from the potential offered by ICTs for development. We recognize the will expressed by some to create an international voluntary "Digital Solidarity Fund", and by others to undertake studies concerning existing mechanisms and the efficiency and feasibility of such a Fund."

One of the open questions/answers is, indeed, the creation and functioning of a Digital Solidarity Fund to support the private sector in ICT development ventures in developing countries, declared Ghana during the WSIS deliberations in support of an important initiative on the matter launched by Senegal. The digital divide is considered to be nothing more than a funding divide. Financial support from development partners is therefore a necessary requirement to enable

14

developing countries implement their ICT programs and projects.

In the opinion of a small country like Andorra, developed countries must have solidarity with the developing countries and do everything possible to enable these countries to benefit from these advances. The small States agreed on a series of basic principles. In practical terms it is essential to combat the digital cleavage which is opening up more and more between rich and poor countries, between big and small countries and between social classes with differing purchasing power. The important basic challenge for the future is that the information be trustworthy and true and in knowing what use should be made of the information, while preserving the cultural identity of every country.

According to Bangladesh we live in an asymmetric world marked by wealth and poverty. The digital divide has widened the development gap. However, there is now a technology that can overcome these differences and lead to a global society with minimum poverty and maximum equity. In this regard, the need for both regional and international cooperation is vital. This is necessary to overcome financial obstacles that impede access to ICT. There is also a need for greater support and cooperation programs from International Financial Institutions. Impetus from the World Summit was, therefore, crucial to create a Digital Solidarity Fund which would inter-alia:

* Channel technical and financial assistance towards national capacity building;
* Facilitate transfer and use of technology from developed countries;
* Assist sharing of knowledge and skills;
* Develop compatible regulations and standards that respect national characteristics and concerns, including spectrum management.

ICT offers a unique opportunity to attain human development and socio-economic targets set by the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It provides a chance for the poorer countries to narrow the gap with the developed world. All states need to demonstrate their united resolve to take up this challenge.

For UNESCO, the key issues are not only, or even mainly, about bridging the technological divide. More fundamentally, it is about overcoming a new knowledge divide, which looms ever-wider. This is why UNESCO has been promoting the concept of knowledge societies, which puts emphasis on empowering human beings to use and transform information in creative, productive and innovative ways. UNESCO is convinced that four key principles underpin such an endeavour: freedom of expression; equal access to education; universal access to information, including a strong public domain of information;

and the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, including multilingualism.

As the coordinator of the global drive towards Education for All (EFA), UNESCO insists that education is the key factor for building capacities to use and benefit from the new technologies. Greater progress in education requires more investment, greater quality, the creation of open and flexible educational systems accessible by everyone, and the utilization of ICT-based tools and methods that enhance learning opportunities.

Fostering and respecting cultural diversity, including linguistic diversity, is one of the fundamental principles of the information society. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) is a key reference point in this regard. Debates about content and language on the Internet are just one expression of the growing global concern about this issue. In Poland's view unhampered exchange of information and the free flow of ideas brings good prospects of successful fight against the stereotypes and intolerance.

As Norbert Wiener once said: "To live effectively is to have information". With a full awareness of all the negative factors linked to the social phenomenon of the Internet, such as international digital divide, cyber crime, intellectual property rights violation and some others, the use of this medium can still

be considered as a constant source of "enlightenment" and social changes. Countries shall all be deeply convinced that it will induce States and societies to recognize common imperative values such as peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and good governance.

It was Turkey's opinion that taking into consideration the insufficient level of certain basic technologies in the developing countries, the prevailing intellectual property and patent policies should be revised with a view to ensuring a moderate, feasible and applicable standard. The sharing and dissemination of the global information and knowledge would also contribute to the development of the desired level of international solidarity and cooperation in combating the scourge of terrorism which has a global character, as witnessed by terrorist attacks in different parts of the world.

South Africa expressed the view that bridging the digital divide is a corrective measure aimed at addressing past and existing inequalities and disparities. This aspect is characterized by a sense of urgency, using any and every kind of technology to patch up where there is no access. For example, developing special measures for the marginalized such as women and youth; providing special equipment for people with disabilities; facilitating the provision of opportunities for the re-training of workers; creating special laws to protect children from harmful uses of ICTs; using public institutions

such as post offices and libraries as access points; creating programs specially designed for rural and remote communities; rolling out ICT projects to link health centres and introducing school curriculum that incorporates ICT training.

Some positions expressed by Asian States are quite relevant. Nepal, for instance, believed that it was remarkable that for the first time all the ICT stake holders in this innovative process had gathered in Geneva with a view to build a new form of partnership and cooperation, interpreted as a new and constructive beginning of a global solidarity. This multistakeholder process is not only a reality of today's interconnected society, it is also indispensable to ensure sustainability of progress and foster social inclusiveness. ICT has become a powerful tool for growth and prosperity for many in today's world. But States should also stress the development dimension of this tool for bringing about real transformation in the lives of the poor and marginalised segments of the societies around the world. That is possible only in a true spirit of partnership and solidarity. The Summit was expected to play a catalytic role in paving the way for a new era of sustained peace, equity and prosperity with the strategic use of Information and Communication technologies to attain these objectives.

In similar terms, the Holy See, through the voice of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, in an address to the United Nations Secretary-General and to the Administrative Committee on Coordi-nation of the United Nations (April 7, 2000), spoke of a "growing sense of international solidarity" that offers the United Nations system "a unique opportunity to contribute to the globalisation of solidarity by serving as a meeting place for States and civil society and a convergence of the varied interests and needs..." In Geneva, in 2004, the Holy See stated that in these days we cannot build a lasting peace without the cooperation of media networks. They can serve the culture of dialogue, participation, solidarity and reconcilia-tion without which peace cannot flourish. If peace is the state which exists when each person is treated with dignity and allowed to develop as a whole person, a courageous contribution of media, instead of featuring violence, immorality and superficiality, could foster a more open and respectful use of ICTs to build better reciprocal knowledge and respect and to foster reconciliation and a more fruitful relationship among peoples of different cultures, ideologies and religions.

As a host country of the WSIS, Switzerland restated its determination to contribute to overcoming the digital divide and reminded that the Summit found some good compromises, even if they have not met all expectations. The Summit laid down rules and principles. Without them, solidarity is just a word, equality of opportunity no more than a

philosophical concept. In fact, the Summit in Geneva expressed a genuine political will, its participants shared a common project: bridging the digital divide, strengthening cultural diversity, respecting freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

However, it was just the first steps towards a better and fairer information society. If solidarity exists between Swiss who speak French, German, Italian and Romansch, it is because there was, at the beginning, a will. A political will, inscribed in the Swiss Constitution and enshrined in the law. A will which resembles, in its own small way, to that which the Summit was expressing in Geneva.

But if this solidarity continues to exist – in Switzerland and other countries – it is also because the international community is resisting the law of the strongest. And it is also because, throughout the world, there are citizens who are convinced that a democratic state which distributes riches is the best guarantor of a fraternal society. Distributing riches means distributing the means to access high-quality information, but also the means to process and disseminate it.

The delegation of the Philippines considered that today, we live in an era of new forms of solidarity by governments and all other stakeholders to form the landscape of the way we conduct business and plot our collective futures. We acknowledge the need to create an enabling environment where all can play a role and perform their responsibility in the development of the Information Society. The same delegation advocated for a real funding mechanism leading to the realization of a digital solidarity agenda for development.

5. Role of Social Capital

The World Bank Group estimates that social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together.

Social capital includes the social and political environment that shapes social structure and enables norms to develop. It encompasses the most formalized institutional relationships and structures, such as government, the political regime, the rule of law, the court system, and civil and political liberties. Economic and social development, which is a pre-requisite for eliminating digital divide, thrives when representatives of the state, the corporate sector, and civil society create forums in and through which they can identify and pursue common goals.

During the deliberations of the Fifty-seventh UN General Assembly, in the Second Committee on 16 October 2002, relevant ideas were advanced by diplomatic representatives from all geographical regions and on 20 November 2002 a draft resolution was adopted on the World Summit on the Information Society (document A/C.2/57/L.42). The Assembly encouraged non-governmental organi-zations (NGOs), civil society and the private sector to contribute to the intergovernmental preparatory process of the Summit and the Summit itself. It also encouraged all relevant United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations, as well as the United Nations Information and Communi-cation Technologies Task Force, to support the preparatory process. The Committee also adopted a draft resolution on creation of a global culture of cybersecurity (document A/C.2/57/L.10/Rev.1) by which the Assembly invited Member States and relevant international organizations to consider the need for a global culture of cybersecurity in their preparations for the WSIS.

The European Union proposed to establish a flexible structure, elaborated enough, to offer a framework allowing making progress through an iterative process in which all participants-governments, international organiza-tions, civil society and private sector – have the opportunity to contribute. Such a framework was intended to be structured around three main headlines: Vision, Guiding Principles and Strategies to carry out the vision. The information society is an ever-increasing reality. Specific examples are visible in our daily life, notably the spread of ICTs. Yet, the changes are not just of a technological nature. They are far-reaching and global, implying new ways of communication. The economy is becoming more and more a knowledge-based activity. That is precisely what the expression "information society" is trying to cover. (13) The emergence of the information society is accompanied by an increasing gap between so called info rich and info poor, creating a digital divide in every society, exacerbating them and threatening the social stability and sustainability. On the other hand, the development of the information society is hampered by a great variety of obstacles and barriers, which must be removed in order to really seize the potential of technologies. There is clearly a great interest in a debate on the characteristics of the information society, and that debate is meant to facilitate a clear vision of the information society.

One of the major outcomes of the Geneva Summit was a "shared vision of the future" or a list of the guiding principles for the information society, as embodied in the Declaration and in the Plan of Action. Such principles include inter alia: human rights and human development, universal access to information and knowledge, promoting economic growth and social cohesion

and communication for all at affordable costs, priority for linguistic diversity and cultural identity, data protection and security, prevalence of the international solidarity and co-operation, and an inclusive and participative society.

This vision requires additional efforts for the development of national, regional and global strategies. At national level, the main themes would be removing obstacles and barriers and creation of an enabling environment through policy frameworks, in particular network security, privacy protection, pro-competitive policy, transparent regulatory frameworks, and commitments for effective market opening and competition. Such environment will create favourable conditions for the development of infrastructure, in particular by the private sector. But there are also more stimulatory actions and, in particular, the mobilisation of the IS potential for key applications. The European Union proposed to focus on three clusters: e-government, e-learning and e-inclusion. This would enable a balanced approach to address both the digital divide and other key issues for the development of the global information society, including education, training and participation. An underlying theme through all three topics encompasses security, enhanced efficiency, privacy protection, and general trust. If these issues are not secured, the new technologies will fail to be of advantage

to governments, the private sector or the population in general.

The Information Society is, by nature, a global phenomenon and issues should and must be addressed on an international basis. The WSIS offered a unique opportunity for awareness building and to deal with questions related to the governance sectors like data protection, privacy, network security, Intellectual Property Rights, cybercrime, etc.

As mentioned earlier, Senegal proposed a voluntary "digital solidarity fund", which it and other developing countries wanted to see reflected in the Declaration. Industrialized countries felt that existing mechanisms -- within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ITU, the World Bank or government official development assistance -- should be utilized. In the negotiations for a more detailed action plan, the differences were narrowing. Switzerland was entrusted with conducting informal negotiations on this question. To hammer out divergences of views on the Declaration, several working groups met along with bilateral and multilateral ad hoc groups.

There has been substantial progress on many items, but agreed language to encapsulate the spirit of the agreement was difficult to be fully crafted. In a number of cases, this boiled down to only a few words or parts of sentences

in an entire paragraph or series of paragraphs in the final documents.

In a broader context, while dealing with social capital and IT, it should be reminded that the foundations of a united Europe were laid on fundamental ideas and values to which Member States subscribe and which are translated into practical reality by the Community's operational institutions. These acknowledged fundamental values include the securing of a lasting peace, unity, equality, freedom, security and solidarity.

At the Pan-European Conference, held in Bucharest in preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society, representatives of governments (ministries, governmental agencies, public administration units etc.) and international organizations, private sector and civil society from the 55 member countries of the UN Economic Commission for Europe have participated, including all EU member States.

As a preparatory event of the WSIS, the Pan-European Regional Ministerial Conference, Bucharest, 7-9 November 2002, adopted a report which included a few basic political principles to sustain the common ground of interest and, in particular, recommendations of actions, identified during the ministerial and thematic debates and partnership events. Its successful outcome can be defined in terms of pragmatism and focus on

creativity. A number of proposals addressed cooperation projects, networking ideas, interdisciplinary undertakings, diversity models, plurisectoral impacts, based on arguments and inputs from various sectors: information, infrastructure for telecommunications, education, media, academia, software production and others. The proposals advanced by governments, business community and civil society were included in the documents as a comprehensive and coherent contribution of this UN regional conference. The specificity of the region was consistently sought and reflected in the recommendations. The final result was used both as a conceptual and operational contribution to the WSIS, and as ideas and proposals for policy initiatives useful for the participating countries

On 9 November 2002 the Bucharest Pan-European Conference on the Information Society adopted the Bucharest Declaration containing a set of principles and priorities offering a Vision of an Information Society beneficial to all (E-inclusion). The European regional conference proposed the vision of an Information Society, where all persons, without distinction of any kind, exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. The Information Society offers great potential in promoting sustainable

development, democracy, transparency, accountability and good governance. Full exploitation of the new opportunities provided by information and communication technologies (ICTs) and of their combination with traditional media, as well as an adequate response to the challenge of the digital divide, should be important parts in any strategy, national and international, aimed at achieving the development goals set by the UN Millennium Declaration on 8 September 2000. There is also a need for a people - centered approach, one that emphasizes social, cultural, economic and governance goals. This approach must ensure that the knowledge and experience of citizens are integrated into this process as the driving force behind the new information society. Global and regional initiatives should build upon previous and current initiatives by Governments, regional and inter-national organizations as well as from the contribution of the private sector and civil society. Member States welcomed the active participation of these stakeholders and their contribution to the overall work.

Principle 7 of the Bucharest Declaration states that international policy dialogue on Information Society at global, regional and sub-regional levels should promote the exchange of experience, the identification and application of compatible norms and standards, the transfer of know-how and the provision of technical assistance with a view to bridging capacity gaps

and setting up international cooperation programmes, in particular in the field of creation of content. Sharing success stories and best practice experiences will also pave the way for new forms of international co-operation. (14)

In a broader context, it is important for the Governments to promote comprehensive and forward-looking national strategies for the development of the Information Society, involving private sector and civil society. Private sector involvement is crucial for a sound and sustainable development of infrastructures, content and application. National e-strategies need to be adapted to the specific requirements of varied communities and reflect the stage of development and the structural characteristics of the national economy. Such strategies can benefit from existing knowledge and experience and exchanges notably on best practices would play a key role, allowing countries to learn from one another through peer dialogue. In the case of smaller countries, regional strategies can contribute to the emergence of larger markets, offering more attractive conditions for private sector investment as well as for a competitive environment

The world today is one of uncertainty, confusion, global vulnerability, shaped by cross-cutting trends. In such an environment, the role of diplomacy will become more, not less essential. The structures of diplomacy, however, are changing in response to

developments occurring within the domestic and international environ-ment. Certainly, changes in information technology make up part of this milieu, but they are accompanied by equally significant processes whereby the State, while remaining a key player in world politics, is joined in the management of complex policy issues by a network of non-governmental actors. This at once provides the professional diplomat with a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in adapting the traditional modes of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to a world where inter-governmental patterns of relationships account for only part of the policy-making environment. The opportunity lies in mobilising the skills of diplomacy in fashioning ever-shifting "coalitions of the willing" to deal with problems that no one actor, governmental or non-governmental, has the capacity to manage.

It seems undoubtedly that information has become one of the principal commodities of a knowledge-based economy in an information age. However, it is indeed equally important for policy makers to understand that information is not just a commodity. Information is also an essential material for innovation, knowledge creation, education, and political discourse. It is therefore significant for policy-makers to understand that the information policies they adopt to deal with the issues associated with the Internet will certainly have profound effects not only on our lives in the information age but

also on our future. In other words, information policies decide the architecture of the information society we live in, and the architecture in turn shapes our lives. This is a decision about whether we will have a desirable way of living in the current new century.

6. Under What Conditions can Digital Solidarity become a Reality?

Entitled Digital Solidarity Agenda, Paragraph 27 of the Plan of Action adopted by consensus by the WSIS on 12 December 2003 states: "The Digital Solidarity Agenda aims at putting in place the conditions for mobilizing human, financial and technological resources for inclusion of all men and women in the emerging Information Society. Close national, regional and international cooperation among all stakeholders in the implementation of this Agenda is vital. To overcome the digital divide, we need to use more efficiently existing approaches and mechanisms and fully explore new ones, in order to provide financing for the development of infrastructure, equipment, capacity building and content, which are essential for participation in the Information Society."

This paragraph has an interesting history. Having noted the sad reality of the digital divide and for the sake of making the Information Society a

successful experience for a much wider range of people, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal proposed in 2003 the concept of Digital Solidarity during the Second Meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on the Information Society. He spoke on behalf of all the marginalized peoples of the Third World and those being excluded from the digital society. From his perspective, irrigated by the awesome effects of an information flow that now moves at the speed of light, our planet has suddenly been transformed into a gigantic village in which distance is no longer measured in kilometers but in bandwidth capacity.

In 2001, 22 out of every 100 Americans were Internet users, while only one out of every 100 Africans had the same opportunity. According to the way in which North-South relations develop, the digital divide can be seen as a glass that is half full or half empty. The understanding of that divide must not come down to a handful of statistical studies and a string of intentions, but rather fuel the inevitable conclusion that it serves to reduce opportunities, exacerbate intellectual and economic poverty and, above all, drive a wedge between cultures and civilizations. Our planet today has need of cohesion in diversity and of mutual comprehension and respect. It is thus that humanity will be capable of rising to the other challenges which destiny sets before it. The information society must derive its principles from this profession of faith.

It is within this context that Senegal placed before the WSIS the concept of digital solidarity. The arguments seem quite convincing and deserve to be summarized with fidelity.

The studies carried out on the digital divide have served to differentiate between those who are advanced and those who are less so. This being the case, has the time not now come to adhere to a common notion, any actions in respect of which could be underpinned by the data resulting from studies on the digital divide? Digital solidarity might consist, for example, in stating that any country whose rate of Internet usage was higher than a certain level should engage in a specified, quantified action for the benefit of countries where the rate is lower than a given level. The International Telecommunication Union could then establish the various statistical ranges and coordinate such actions with governments and the private sector.

By way of a practical image, one could imagine a digital snake fluctuating between a lower and an upper limit. The joint efforts would then be focused on ensuring that all countries were within the snake. Here you can see the analogy with monetary integration and the policy of convergence. The snake would evolve through time and the fluctuation amplitude would narrow, ultimately causing the digital divide to disappear.

This process could be enshrined in the Charter on digital solidarity to be signed by all States having signified their adherence.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) offers a framework within which this concept could succeed. Senegal was gratified to note that the near technological virginity of the African continent and of the countries of the South in general was in reality an asset. Telecommunication and information technology companies might agree that this virginity eliminates the risk of the kind of technological migration that often proves so costly in the North. The principle of digital solidarity should make for balanced access to the planet's abundant technological resources. It cannot be limited to a North-South exchange. The South has demonstrated its ability, under certain conditions, to serve as an example of successful digital emergence. The example of India should inspire leaders from the South, that country having succeeded in the space of a few years in transforming itself into a veritable technological power, thereby positioning its people as a major player in the information society.

In his excellent work entitled "The clash of civilizations", the Harvard professor Samuel Huntington describes the process whereby civilizations have gained the upper hand over nations when it comes to tracing the history of the world. The clash to which he refers could instead become a meeting, and this is the challenge that the information society should be addressing.

The delegation of Senegal believed firmly in the emergence of a universal civilization in which, as in the United Nations, all cultures would be represented in order to assert themselves and maintain an exchange. If provided with the means to do so, the South will contribute to the e-civilization to which the information society is now calling us. It has so much to show, to say and to offer, if only it were afforded the opportunity to do so.

In practical terms, Digital Solidarity is a global initiative consisting in collecting voluntary contributions coming from the civil society, the private sector and the states with the view to financing structuring projects that will enable people, countries and areas of the world suffering from the digital divide to enter in a satisfactory manner the era of the Information Society. In order to confer much flexibility and efficiency to the initiative, it has been proposed to establish a new international setting, The World Foundation of Digital Solidarity, in charge of the transparent management of the Digital Solidarity Funds to the benefit of all the countries that have already signed the charter.

However, the UN World Summit on the Information Society has agreed to disagree on actually creating a "Digital Solidarity Fund" to help poorer

nations expand their information economies. The WSIS only agreed on a Plan of Action and Declaration of Principles aimed primarily at closing the so-called digital divide and bringing information services to those currently without them. A major sticking point has been whether countries should contribute cash to a Digital Solidarity Fund that would be used to build out information infrastructure in developing nations, as evidently proposed by Senegal.

Pre-summit meetings of WSIS delegates came to an agreement on a postponement of agreement on the fund, after scepticism from the EU and Japan. The final Plan of Action, as adopted by consensus, calls for a UN task force, reporting to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to conduct "a thorough review" of existing and possible funding mechanisms which should be completed before the end of 2004.

The President of Senegal declared that December 12 every year will be celebrated as 'Digital Solidarity Day'. Essentially, it's a fundraising exercise. In the closing press conference, ITU Secretary-General Yoshio Utsumi confirmed that this is a "voluntary" celebration. The world press commented that the Digital Solidarity Fund, touted as a means to bridge the divide between the South and North and also gender disparities, may be still born in the absence of commitment from developing countries. Developed

countries are reportedly reluctant to support the fund, citing what they see as unwillingness by developing countries to commit themselves both financially and materially.

The Plan of Action adopted by WSIS is also said to have contributed to the stalemate in negotiations on the fund. It places most of the responsibility for bridging the digital divide on governments, with lighter and less measurable obligations being given to stakeholders such as telecommunication companies.

"In the current deadlock, developing countries have not shown a commitment to contribute to the fund, yet they stand to win if the rural communities have access to information and communication technologies," said Ekwow Spio-Garbrah, chief executive officer of the Commonwealth Telecom-munication Organisation. (15)

The United States, backed by the European Union, Japan and Canada, has turned back a bid by developing nations to place the Internet under the control of the United Nations or its member governments.

The nations agreed to ask U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to set up a working group on Internet governance "in an open and inclusive process that ensures a mechanism for the full participation of governments, the private sector and civil society ... to investigate and make proposals for

action, as appropriate, by 2005."

The decision was welcomed by Paul Twomey, president and chief executive officer of the California-based Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which coordinates such matters as servers and domain names. "This has been a victory for the pro-business model," he said. "I think this language is actually very pleasing. ..."

"We think the action plan reflects the sort of argument we've been making for the last months. The partnership of the private sector and civil society has actually helped build the Internet, and we think that's the right sort of partnership for going forward."

Senior diplomats familiar with the confidential talks said the compromise stemmed from the firm stance taken by the United States and compromise language offered by Canada and the Swiss chairman of the talks, Marc Furrer. The latter is the director of Switzerland's Federal Office of Communications.

"The Swiss were good at cooling things down," said one diplomat who participated in the talks. "At times, things got quite feisty between China, Brazil, South Africa, the U.S. and others."

Given the dramatic growth of the medium, developing countries have been pushing for a greater role in managing and setting policy for the Internet. But the United States and its supporters have argued that government interference could retard growth of the Internet.

"We feel as the system gets more complex, we don't want the whole question of Internet governance to be concentrated around the existing ICANN, which is closely linked to the U.S. Department of Commerce," a senior Brazilian diplomat said.

An Argentinian official said many governments are frustrated because the Internet is having a tremendous effect in their countries, but they have no place to submit their requests, complaints or suggestions. "The key point is, can a government work with an organization like ICANN? How a government deals with ICANN is not the same for the United States as for Mali. There should be an entity where all governments have the same rights somewhere inside the U.N." But in the end, one Latin American ambassador said, "No one wanted to challenge the real power of the private sector of the rich countries."(16)

7. Solidarity is a Pre-Requisite not a Panacea.

Paragraph 56 of the Geneva Declaration of 12 December 2003 has a special relevance for this paper, as it places solidarity in its natural global

context. I states: "The Information Society should respect peace and uphold the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature."

At its origins solidarity refers to social power in its final, most perfect state. It defines the condition in which a group of people view each other as cherished coworkers in achieving a goal. Where solidarity exists, social bonds are strong, mutual support is unreserved, and the exploitation of social bonds for private gain unthinkable. Solidarity is desired/ desirable for the entire society, not for just a part of it. As a great imaginative philosopher Durkheim explained some of the sources of social solidarity. *Mechanical solidarity* arises when people eat, drink, worship or play together. Such solidarity can elicit cooperation between persons and groups who have little in common or even have, objectively, cause for conflict. Religion can bind people into mutually affirming relationships. It can also bind slaves and slavemasters together in common endeavor; can bind workers and owners together; can bind ethnic groups together and thus generate social peace. *Organic solidarity* is said to arise from a division of labor in which specialized workers in each occupation depend upon skilled workers in other occupations. Electricians, carpenters, plumbers, masons, and bankers are, all, involved in the construction of a home, office

building or dam. Regardless of race, religion or ethnic loyalties, they respond to each other because they need each other to get the job done. Looking at the larger society, bankers, farmers, priests, police, clerks, teachers and industrial workers all do something the others need...or think they need. Durkheim argued that this kind of solidarity was proof of the super-organic nature of society and proof that *mechanical solidarity* alone was not sufficient to solve the problem of social order. Both lambs and lions have organs which are functionally interdependent but which produce very different animals; the point is to look at the totality

According to modern diplomatic thinking, solidarity is a universal concept and should become a universal value. Solidarity connotes protection and security. A family, a village, a tribe, a nation requires the solidarity of its members to survive, to ensure its safety from outside predators, to secure its welfare. This implies specific forms of organisation, an allocation of response-bilities and a system of rewards and sanctions. Security of the individual and loyalty to the group are the two faces of the same social bond. In that elementary sense, *solidarity is the most fundamental social requirement and there is no society without solidarity.*

Solidarity also connotes the cohesion of a group of people sharing common conditions and common interests and cooperating to improve

their position in society. This active form of solidarity, at the national and international levels, has been the vehicle for much progress in the human condition and for all movements towards more equality and social justice. Solidarity within regions has taken very concrete and powerful forms during the last part of the 20th century. It stems from a perception of common interests and economic gains to be made through cooperation and union. Trade has been and remains the driving force for regional solidarity and cooperation. In 1995, there were 62 regional trading arrangements, 40 having been set up in the 1990s and 11 in the 1980s; some of these were bilateral free trade agreements between minor trading nations, while others, notably the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement, account for preponderant shares of world trade.

Solidarity with future generations is a value which has reappeared in cultures dominated by short term economic gains and policies, and which was prompted by the damages done to the environment. In less materialistic and less impatient cultures, the transmission to the young generation of both social mores and a hospitable physical milieu has remained a central preoccupation. The proposal made in the United Nations to include in every important negotiation and debate a person appointed to represent the interests of future generations, might be worth considering. Solidarity among groups and social classes with different levels of wealth and income is expressed in the payment of taxes, which is the main instrument for redistributing income from the affluent to those in need. Taxes have been, throughout history, a reason for revolts and a manifestation of civic virtue. Recently, in affluent societies, there has been a strong intellectual and political movement to denounce taxation as evidence of inefficient and malevolent government. There is an obvious correlation between this fashion and the aggravation of inequalities.

Charity has been much devalued in the modern psyche. It provides satisfaction to the giver, alleviates temporarily, the plight of the receiver, but creates dependency, expects gratitude and contributes to a maintenance of the status-quo in social and political terms. Solidarity itself is being criticised as being too close to charity. Yet, charity should be, and often is, a disposition of the heart and mind, a capacity to love the other, rather than a political statement of superiority and an alibi for the perpetuation of inequalities. Charity is a virtue, not a policy. An act of love, not the fulfilment of a duty. In that sense charity provides a moral foundation for the search for justice, and for solidarity.

The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy describes fraternity as the missing and forgotten aspiration. It suffered from the over consumption and misuse of ideals and utopias that

occurred during this century. It was, always, difficult to reconcile fraternity with liberty. Particularly difficult was the compatibility of this concept with a culture of self-gratification. Fraternity was also set aside by social sciences. It was not a category that a narrowly utilitarian and quantitatively obsessed perception of economics could accept. And the sociological discourse preferred more "technical" concepts such as "social integration". Now that philosophy, as a discipline and as a dimension of the public discourse, is regaining favour, and now that many societies have been shaken by disintegrating forces, the concept of fraternity might be reopened. The emphasis on solidarity is a step in this direction. Solidarity has a strong emotional appeal and is amenable to political leadership. As such, it can be used as a mobilising force for a number of worthwhile causes. Young people have a particular capacity to experience solidarity, which expresses the joy of giving and the satisfaction of being human with other humans. As many values, solidarity can be distorted and perverted. There is solidarity in a gang and in organised crime. Authoritarian leaders call upon their people for discipline and solidarity.

At the international level, the concept of solidarity has recently gained prominence. In its most commonly accepted meaning, solidarity expresses itself through gifts in money and in kind, notably in cases of natural or other disasters. One view is that on the international scene, the concept of solidarity should be used only for this sort of occasional and specific assistance to people or countries in distress. Beyond this, international cooperation for development should be based on mutuality of interest, partnership, and fairness in the elaboration and implementation of the "rules of the game" for trade, investment and other types of exchange. For this school of thought solidarity evokes charity, which is not an acceptable base for international relations. And also, why solidarity and not interdependence? In what way is solidarity a better concept than true partnership? What about the ambivalent relationship between solidarity and old and new forms of conditionality?

Another view is that, indeed, solidarity cannot be a substitute for the struggle for fair economic arrangements and for economic justice: there is room for both. As in relations between social groups and classes in a national setting, even the best and most equitable world economic order would not eliminate situations requiring the expression of solidarity. Moreover, while there is indeed a contradiction between economic justice and solidarity, because solidarity implies inequalities, it can be a useful contradiction. To keep a tension between two poles of international cooperation for development enables the partners to find room for manoeuvre, negotiation and progress. Of course, this is possible only if a clear distinction is kept

between these two modes of cooperation.

Overall, solidarity, while being a value in itself because no human being can live in isolation, has to be always seen and assessed in relation with its raison d'être and objectives. Perhaps even more decisively, and with less possible ambiguities, the value of solidarity ought to be assessed in relation with the attitude and behaviour of those who are, individually and collectively, partners in solidarity. Willingness to exchange, humility to accept criticism, ability for self evaluation, interest in the views and cultures of others, are, in addition to the capacity to give, necessary ingredients for a true culture of solidarity. It is because of these basic moral norms, valid for individuals as well as for institutions, that there is a continuum between various forms and expressions of solidarity. For example, there is a clear correlation between the willingness and capacity of a country to build solidarity among its citizens, and the interest of the same country to show solidarity at the international level. Ultimately the one – individual, group or nation – who gives, for whom solidarity has in traditional terms, a cost, is made richer – morally, intellectually and spiritually – by the very act of giving. (17)

The duty of solidarity is an imperative prerequisite of the irreversible process of globalization. Building trust and forging solidarity is a crucial task. Without trust there are no right answers to fundamental questions. Solidarity may lead to building alliances enabling the world community to be stronger and better prepared to face unprecedented challenges.

8. From Geneva to Tunis via Bangkok, Shanghai, Sao Paolo and New York

The Tunisian representatives announced in various international meetings that their country was already fully involved in preparations for the Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, to take place in November 2005. Cabinet meetings were held regularly, all Ministries had been involved, and a high-level National Committee had been created to steer all preparations. They called on all components, including the private sector, civil society and the media, to contribute to the Summit. The first Preparatory Committee will be held in Tunis at the end of June 2004, and consultations on holding regional and thematic conferences are under way. The expected outcome of the Tunis Summit is a political document and an operational agenda built on regional action plans. (18)

Marc Furrer, Director of the Swiss Federal Office of Communications, called on the private sector and civil society to participate fully in the Tunis phase. The private sector would be very much needed in implementing the

WSIS Plan of Action, and together with civil society should participate fully to the preparations for Tunis. Tunisia had taken over the responsibility for the Summit. Switzerland was prepared to help and advise, "but of course Tunisia is now in charge, even if we will not drop the ball".

But before the second phase of the WSIS in Tunis, UNCTAD XI in Sao Paolo, Brazil, in June 2004, as well as other meetings in Geneva, Bangkok, Shanghai and New York will deal with the topical issue of how to reduce/eliminate digital divide and how to promote global digital solidarity. The debates will not be easy or superficial, because the facts are more and more convincing that the digital divide persists.

On 6 April 2004 South African representatives stated: "The digital divide is growing rather than narrowing despite efforts to rectify the imbalance.... The information and communication technology (ICT) sector in our country reflects the skewed landscape of ownership, control and access to resources between those who were advantaged and disadvantaged by the previous regime...." They explained that a huge digital divide still existed between the rich and poor, black and white, rural and urban populations in the country.

However, during a two-day meeting organised by the WTO and the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Nairobi on March 30-31 2004, both the EU and the US agreed to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the huge agricultural subsidies that led to the deadlock in Cancun in September 2003. Attended by 15 African countries, the meeting was the most successful of a post-Cancun series of meetings that have been held to soften the tough stance adopted by both the US and the EU against developing countries. Officials from the WTO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), business associations and government officials attended the high-level meeting.

UNCTAD Secretary-General Rubens Ricupero reminded that developed countries have an obligation to assist Africa to fully integrate in the world trade system. He pointed out that poor countries are reluctant to participate fully in international trade talks because of the unfair subsidies.

Earlier, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, in his statement at the opening plenary of the 49th session of the Trade and Development Board, Geneva, on 7 October 2002 pronounced memorable words: "solidarity is either indivisible or does not exist in practice". In that spirit, "Indivisible solidarity applies not only to global warming or to the fight against AIDS, but also to the struggle against extreme poverty, desperation, frustration, and the situation of countries like the least developed or the African countries, countries in Latin America and in other

regions, and also the people who have lagged behind in developed industrial countries and have become poor and jobless."

Indeed, if solidarity is not universal, global challenges cannot be faced successfully. The fact that we have been able so far to preserve multilateral structures offers some hope. At least there is a chance that the multilateral approach will focus on demolishing barriers and not erecting new ones. The essential mechanisms of the multilateral trading system are not yet lost. In Geneva, there is something worth preserving. Multilateralism is a school to learn about moral and ethical values. Irrespective of any image about the reality of globalization, the economy cannot be treated like astronomy or physics, but as well defined framework of ethical values, solidarity being one of them.

Solidarity requests more effective international cooperation. Solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. Much more than vague promises of support or feelings of compassion, solidarity has a spiritual quality that must become more deeply rooted in our approach to international problems. Pope John Paul II has called for a "globalization of solidarity," which ensures that globalization will not take place to the detriment of the least favored and the weakest if it is based on a complete conception of the human person, on a adequate understanding of

the dignity and rights of the person. There is a need "for rethinking international cooperation in terms of a new culture of solidarity." Efforts towards international governance in the area of sustainable development will help to produce a more coherent framework for development, especially if based on a common set of principles and adopt measures to ensure transparency and accountability. There is a need "for effective international agencies [to] oversee and direct the economy to the common good [and to] give sufficient support and consideration to peoples and countries which have little weight in the international market but which are burdened by the most acute and desperate needs." But without a clear set of priorities and a more definite plan of implementation, any agreement reached will be in danger of remaining unfulfilled.

At the United Nations, in New York, Venezuela, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, stressed the need for greater linkages between public and private companies in science and technology. The bulk of knowledge and technology was concentrated in a limited number of developed countries. Developing countries had lagged behind, exaggerating the economic and social disparity in those countries. There is an urgent need to transfer technology and science to developing countries, both to spur competition between developing countries and to decrease the digital divide.

That transfer would promote competition between developing countries, Venezuela stressed. UNCTAD has a clear mandate to develop programmes in technology and science. She emphasized the importance of focusing on transfer, absorption and development of information and communication technologies during the WSIS. The Group believed science and technology were vital for sustainable development and urged developing countries to create favourable conditions for technological and scientific innovation.

At an informal meeting in Geneva dedicated to the preparation of the WSIS, the European Union stated inter alia:

> "One of the major outcomes of the Summit should be a "shared vision of the future" or a list of the guiding principles for the information society. Among such principles we would see: human rights and human development, universal access to information and knowledge, promoting economic growth and social cohesion and communication for all at affordable costs, priority for linguistic diversity and cultural identity, data protection and security, prevalence of the international solidarity and co-operation, and an inclusive and participative society."

It was really challenging to see how solidarity issue was finally reflected in the WSIS documents, having in mind the idea that the information society is built on the assumption that solidarity may be globalized.

The European Way springs from traditions which recognise that economic activity is crucial, but is not the whole of life. The French Revolution rallied to the call for "Liberté, Fraternité et Egalité". The great changes in the former Soviet bloc - which opened it to market vigour and the world to globalization - were largely precipitated by a group in Poland called Solidarnosc - Solidarity.

The World-Wide Web was invented by a citizen of Belgium and one of the UK working in solidarity together in Switzerland - and they designed it to be maximally useful for the advancement of knowledge as a good in itself. It provides an astounding resource for education, and promises finally to transform education from the inculcation of information to instilling the skill of learning. The European Way is based in traditions of social solidarity, and of a search for sustainability and equilibrium between the needs of people and the biosphere in the long term. It considers "politics" as the empowerment of citizens to organise and influence affairs according to mutually acceptable ethical principles. A global society dialogue is a necessary step towards that end. The

best immediate hope for a liveable information society lies in resisting and defeating pressure to exclude the concerns of the European Way from the framework of global governance. The information society must grow up into a society fit for all the peoples of the world, and their grandchildren.

The objective of building an information society should be adequately reflected in all relevant documents to be adopted in November 2005 in Tunisia.

Without solidarity there can be no sustainable development. Before the Summit in Geneva more references to global solidarity were made by States. Some of them are remarkable and deserve to be better known.

Paraguay asserted: "There is absolutely no doubt that the world is living through a crucial juncture in its history. The majority of the statements made here had indicated the pressing need for a sweeping rethinking on a cultural, political, social and economic level for a new "solidarity compact". In Belgium's view: "Ce ne sont pas les analyses qui manquent. Ce ne sont pas les solutions qui font défaut. Ce qui fait défaut; c'est la volonté politique commune de les appliquer. Ce qui fait défaut ; c'est d'oser la vraie solidarité. Une solidarité qui se traduit par un accès aux outils financiers."

Cape Verde developed the same idea, reminding: "D'ailleurs, l'humanité est liée par un destin commun et la construction de ce destin ne saurait etre que la responsabilité de tous et l'oeuvre de chacun. Pour cela, nous devrons forger les normes éthiques correspondantes, fondées sur l'unicité et la communauté de destin, sur la co-responsabilité dans la gestion du futur et sur la solidarité internationale intégrant une forte conscience humaniste et écologique."

At Rio Summit in 1992 the NGOs proposed a Treaty on a Technology Bank Solidarity System for Technological Exchange, according to which: "The technology bank, or solidarity system of technology exchange, will be constituted on the basis of offers of technology which will be deposited in the bank in order to be shared with other groups and local communities. The relationships are founded upon reciprocity, solidarity and equality. Every group contributing cultural, technological and social knowledge has the right to receive similar information as needed and if available in the bank."

The proposed bank was expected to approve a code of ethics among its users in order to protect knowledge and experiences which are deposited. The protection will be founded upon identification of the authors or contributors, mutual commitments and solidarity to avoid the appropriation by individual or commercial interest or actions that would reduce the solidarity approach of the exchange. At the

Johannesburg Summit on Social Development 2002, a proposal was advanced on establishing a World Solidarity Fund for Poverty Eradication and the Promotion of Human Development in the poorest regions of the world. That was a new bold initiative. Ignacy Sachs asserted in Liberation dated 26 August 2002: "L'enjeu du développement durable, c'est bien d'inventer un nouveau paradigme. Les objectifs dictés par la solidarité avec la génération présente sont éthiques et sociaux. La solidarité avec les générations futures introduit une contrainte environnementale. Enfin, le troisième volet repose sur la viabilité économique des stratégies proposées. C'est une autre façon de penser le développement. La dimension environnementale doit nous forcer à modifier radicalement les échelles de temps et d'espace dans lesquelles il nous faudra travailler, en nous obligeant à penser simultanément le très court terme et le très long terme, à raisonner aussi en termes d'impacts locaux, nationaux et globaux, les trois se prolongeant jusqu'à la biosphère…"

Samuel Huntington's thesis about a "clash of civilizations" is interesting but is considered not valid by many people. In reality, we are facing a clash of solidarities. By solidarity we mean a loyal agreement of interests, aims, principles, cohesion, community of feelings and responsibilities. The UN General Assembly on behalf of 189 members of the world organization expressed on Sept.12, 2001, through an unanimously adopted resolution, its solidarity with the United States. However, the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of terrorism continued to show their own criminal "solidarity". Civilizational affinities have no role in this terrific game. Terrorism is de facto and de jure fully contradictory to any national interest and modern principles of international conduct, having nothing to do with any real transnational religious or cultural identity. A terrorist attack on one country is an attack against mankind and an affront to the human spirit. We witnessed an extraordinary historic event when all nations of the world closed ranks to an unprecedented degree of solidarity and strongly condemned the heinous acts of terrorism.

The global solidarity expressed through the United Nations as a response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks demonstrated that religion and civilization could not replace reasonable pragmatism, genuine national interests and general principles of public international law. It illustrated the existence and recognition of a duty of solidarity as an imperative prerequisite of the irreversible process of globalization in a world in which every human being may exercise his/her fundamental rights to live, to love, to hope, to dream, without any fear, as the disastrous phenomenon of terror would have no chance to emerge and flourish. The epic clash of authentic solidarity embodied by the United Nations with the malefic solidarity of terrorism's

forces remains a dramatic peculiarity of our age.

According to Dr. Kim-Hak Su, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the information society is one in which individuals and communities are empowered through full access to, effective use and active development of, knowledge and information. This concept is often cited, but the potential impacts on people and communities are underestimated. In an information society development paradigm, we will not stop at teaching a man or woman to fish, we will also help him or her to know the weather, purchase a more efficient engine, process his/her catch using new, low cost, renewable technologies, sell it to far away markets and participate in environmental monitoring and conservation activity. Most importantly, this way, a community can maintain a traditional way of life without compromising opportunities for improving its quality. In a region as diverse, culturally rich, and, at the same time, poor in some material resources as ours, the development of an information society holds much promise. (19)

While presenting the Secretary-General Kofi Annan's message to the first Asian-African Subregional Organizations Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, from 29 to 30 July 2002, referring to the Non-Alignment, Dr. Kim–Hak Su pronounced the following

sentence: "The core values of [the Bandung] spirit -- solidarity, friendship and cooperation -- are in keeping with the United Nations purposes and ideals and are completely relevant today." ESCAP, as the largest regional commission on our planet, with its 62 members and associate members, may illustrate and further develop the great potential of those core values. As a preparatory event of the World Summit on the Information Society, the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference adopted on 15 January 2003 the Tokyo Declaration, offering the Asia-Pacific perspective to the WSIS. In its Preamble representatives of the governments of 47 countries, 22 international organizations, 54 private sector entities and 116 non-governmental organizations (NGO) emphasized that a primary aim of the Information Society must be to facilitate full utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT) at all levels in society and hence enable the sharing of social and economic benefits by all, by means of ubiquitous access to information networks, while preserving diversity and cultural heritage.(20) The Conference endorsed the important role that ICTs can play in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which describe a fundamental set of principles and guidelines for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and gender inequality.

In the main body of the document

the concept of an Information Society is described as one in which highly-developed ICT networks, equitable and ubiquitous access to information, appropriate content in accessible formats and effective communication can help people to achieve their potential, promote sustainable economic and social development, improve quality of life for all, alleviate poverty and hunger, and facilitate participatory decision-making processes. Consequently, the Information Society in the Asia-Pacific region must inter alia provide equitable and appropriate access for all to well-developed, affordable and easily-accessed information and communication network infrastructures, and continue the ongoing spirit of cooperation and solidarity among the countries of the region.

Recognizing the unique features of the Information Society in the Asia-Pacific region, the Tokyo Conference recalled that the region comprises the earth's largest land mass and vast ocean as well as many small islands. The region has over 65 per cent of the world's population, including over 75 per cent of the world's poor. Many countries of the region have very low population densities spread over large percentages of their areas. Many rural populations are also inaccessible, and have limited contact with other communities.

This region enjoys a richness of ancient and modern cultures, including diverse languages, social traditions and customs. Of the more than 6,800 languages in the world, 3,500 (51 per cent) are spoken in the Asia-Pacific region, including languages without written scripts. Linguistic and cultural diversity enriches the development of society by giving expression to a range of different values and ideas. It can facilitate the spread and use of information by presenting it in the language and cultural context most familiar to the user, thereby further encouraging the use of ICTs.

Promoting broadband networks in the Asia-Pacific region could not only support research, business and personal activities, but also help to preserve cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge and traditions. In this context, an effort should be made to support multilingual domain names, local content development, digital archives, diverse forms of digital media, content translation and adaptation. The development of standard and recognized character sets and language codes should also be supported.

Digital divide disparities are illustrated by the fact that in the region as a whole, there is a noticeable disparity in access to, and use of, the latest ICTs, including Internet access and broadband availability, between and within countries. It is recognized that the barriers to equitable access result from differences in education and literacy levels, gender, age, income and connectivity. In this context, particular

attention should be given to least developed countries, economies in transition and post-conflict countries.

There is also an imbalance of information flows. While there is substantial internal international trade within the Asia-Pacific, North American and European regions, the same cannot be said for the flow of information between these regions. There is potential for growth in information flows between the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world, as well as between countries within the region.

The Tokyo Conference recognized the special circumstances of regional small island developing States. These countries, vulnerable to environmental hazards, and characterized by small, homogenous markets, high costs of access and equipment, human resource constraints exacerbated by the problem of "brain-drain", limited access to networks and remote locations require particular attention and tailored solutions to meet their needs.

The development of the Information Society must be based on platforms of internationally interoperable technical standards, accessible for all, and technological innovation of ICTs, as well as systems to promote the exchange of knowledge at global, regional and subregional levels through any media. In this regard, in addition to enhancing people's awareness of the advantages of using ICTs, reliable, advanced and appropriate, ICT technologies and services infrastructure are required.

As a sharp increase in the volume of international and regional Internet traffic is anticipated, it is important to strengthen regional and international broadband network infrastructure by using new technologies to enhance network efficiency and provide the capacity to match the needs of the countries in the region.

Working towards open and flexible international and interoperable standards is an important issue for all countries so as to ensure that all can utilize the technology and associated content and services to their maximum potential. Development and deployment of open-source software should be encouraged, as appropriate, as should open standards for ICT networking.

In order to achieve affordable and universal access to ICTs it is important to enable existing and new technologies to provide connectivity to all, in particular through institutions accessible to the public such as schools, libraries, post offices and multi-purpose community centres. Special attention should be paid to how ICTs can benefit the disadvantaged, through innovative initiatives.

The private sector plays an important role in the development and diffusion of ICTs, while civil society, including NGOs, works closely with

communities in strengthening ICT-related initiatives. In a spirit of solidarity, increased cooperation and partnerships are needed between governmental and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and civil society, for effective design and implementation of various initiatives, by giving priority to locally-available human resources. All stakeholders are urged to mobilize resources for the development of the Information Society, including through increasing investment in telecommunication infrastructure, human capacity building, policy frameworks and the development of culturally sensitive local content and applications. International and regional organizations, including financial and development institutions, have an important role to play in integrating the use of ICTs in the development process and making available the necessary resources for this purpose.

The sixtieth session of the UNESCAP (Shanghai, 22-28 April 2004) had the region's future at the top of its agenda. "We have a forward-looking agenda on the table and some of the best minds in the region to discuss how to tackle the present and future problems of the region," said Mr Kim Hak-Su, UNESCAP's Executive Secretary. The theme of the Session was *Meeting the challenges in an era of globalization by strengthening regional development cooperation*. Implementation of the WSIS documents was also considered by the UNESCAP which is the longest-standing

intergovernmental multilateral economic and social development organization in Asia and the Pacific region with the widest representation.

The highlight of 2004 session was the *High-Level Visionary Panel Meeting for Asia-Pacific 2020*. The focus of the Panel Meeting was to identify the key challenges facing Asia-Pacific towards the year 2020 and identify measures, particularly through regional cooperation, to meet those challenges.

During the Millennium Summit in September 2000, dealing with current challenges, all countries shared a vision of global solidarity and security, reflected in the Millennium Declaration as a true consensus. In 2003-2004 this achievement was being questioned. In 2000, Tunisia proposed the creation of a World Solidarity Fund (WSF) as a tool to consolidate efforts to relieve poverty in the world's most destitute regions. The proposal stemmed from the belief that solidarity among states and peoples was a humanitarian duty and a moral obligation. The reaction of the international community was quite positive. A consensus was reached on the objectives of the WSF, as well as on its modes of funding and operating, and it was officially created as a trust fund of the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The UNDP Administrator was requested to urgently take further measures and establish a high-level committee to define the strategy of the Fund and to mobilise financial

resources. All states were invited by Tunisia to spare no effort in speeding up the WSF operation, thus allowing it to start its activities as soon as possible and contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. On October 1st 2003 it was announced from the Tokyo International Conference on African Development III (TICAD III) that Japan has shown its commitment to the African continent by pledging about US one billion dollars to be used in education programs. The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation's (CTO) Conference on "Implementing the WSIS Action Plan" held it's first two sessions in Nairobi on 25 March 2004. The Conference was aimed at helping African countries to move toward the effective implementation of the WSIS Action Plan adopted in December 2003 in Geneva.

Mr. Mamadou Diop, Minister of Information and Pan-African Co-operation for New Information and Communication Technologies of Senegal, argued the case for an all-stakeholders commitment to the Digital Solidarity Fund created last December, following the first WSIS phase. He captured this issue of funding; "Africa missed the industrial revolution, it should not miss the informational revolution... Of all the gaps that make up the digital divide, the capital divide is the most important".

The developing countries believe that the UN must be a dynamic and universal permanent forum for all international relations and it must continue to be the catalyst for global solidarity which requests generous funding to become operational. It must not be ignored or marginalised, but reformed and well equipped to be efficient in meeting the epic challenges of modern human history. The UN was not created to be a colosseum of recriminations, but a centre for harmonising the actions of nations in the attainment of common ends.

In a study entitled *The Challenges of Multilateral Diplomacy in 1999,* Mr. James P. Muldoon, Jr., Senior Policy Analyst, United Nations Association of the USA, identifies a "reality gap" exhibited by many policymakers in their understanding of the United Nations and how things get done there; the UN is first and foremost an institutional framework for modern diplomacy and collective decision-making of the international community. From an academic perspective, there is a need to improve the competency of practitioners of diplomacy on the nuances and subtleties of participating in multilateral diplomatic meetings today. (21) The end of the Cold War introduced many uncertainties into international relations, which are having a profound impact on the United Nations and the practice of multilateral diplomacy. Everyone agrees that the world is experiencing dramatic changes, but there is no consensus as to the meaning and magnitude of these changes and what the future has in store

for us. A grand debate among scholars and policymakers is going on over the nature and structure of contemporary international relations. It appears to revolve around three basic positions-- retrogression, transformation and transition.

There is a trepidation in this debate which is partially compounded by the lack of vision and wisdom among today's national political leaders and the public opinion. As a historian, Fritz Stern argues in a presentation:

"We live in a profoundly a historical age. Our knowledge of the past remains dim; our consciousness is dominated by headlines, by snippets from the screen that tell us of the latest crisis or atrocity. In a globalized world our attention shifts rapidly, our perspective has broadened, our understanding has narrowed. ...The leaders of today are all too often caught up in crisis management or in pursuit of electoral gains; the public is tired or suspicioius of grand designs."(22)

While admitting that the world community has entered a new stage in its development, it should be clear that we are not experiencing a global revolution or radical transformation. With all the change that is going on in the world, there is much visible continuity. Diplomacy is still the tool of States, international organizations are still creatures founded by and for States, and the reform of the international system is unconceivable without the direct participation of States. Diplomacy and international organizations are in the forefront of this process. The civil society has no equal position in global governance, even if it considers itself competent and capable in the practice of diplomacy and influential in the United Nations. The forces of globalization and fragmentation that characterize the post-Cold War environment do not diminish the intrinsic value of the existing international system. The world is in transition toward a reformed world order, and the changes in multilateral diplomacy and the United Nations may facilitate this process. There is hope that multilateral institutions and diplomacy are flexible enough and sufficiently robust to manage the transition successfully.

In the light of the most recent developments on world arena, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's assessment that the United States needs a stronger, more effective United Nations – and therefore needs to be a leader within the United Nations, is very topical. And, as emphasized in the same context, that is very important, not only for the United States itself, but for the world. When the United States shows leadership and takes an active part in the work of the United Nations, all our efforts are strengthened dramatically. The United States and the United Nations must continue to work

together, to promote common objectives of stability and development around the world which will gradually lead to the elimination of the current dramatic digital divide.

The final conclusion of the Declaration of Principles adopted by the WSIS brings a dose of temperate optimism: **"We are firmly convinced** that we are collectively entering a new era of enormous potential, that of the Information Society and expanded human communication. In this emerging society, information and knowledge can be produced, exchanged, shared and communicated through all the networks of the world. All individuals can soon, if we take the necessary actions, together build a new Information Society based on shared knowledge and founded on global solidarity and a better mutual understanding between peoples and nations. We trust that these measures will open the way to the future development of a true knowledge society."

We may, indeed, hope that the humanistic concept of **Opus Solidaritatis Pax** will get visible tangibility. (23) As cogently emphasized by Finland referring to the WSIS*: "The message of this summit is clear. The world needs solidarity - a common sense of responsibility and commitment to removing inequality. This is an absolute precondition of the creation of a global information society. It can, and should, promote the*

achievement of the Millennium Development goals."(24)

The deliberations of the 59th session of the UN General Assembly in New York, starting in September 2004, are expected to offer new testimonies to those realistic aspirations.

References

1. The two documents adopted by the WSIS-Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action- are reproduced as an appendix to the present issue of *ABAC Journal*, pp. 77 - 108.

2. The basic elements of this summary and relevant figures are available at http://www.itu.int/wsis/geneva visited in March-April 2004.

3. D. Murali, Bridging digital divides, Business Line, 14 April 2004, available at http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/bline/ew
See also: Arkin, William M., The Internet and Strategic Studies, Washington, Center for Strategic Education, the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 1998; Berkowitz, Bruce D. and Allan E. Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence And Security In The Information Age, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. Richard M. Moose, "From U2 to URL:

Technology and Foreign Affairs", Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, Summer/ Fall 2000, http://cfdev.georgetown.edu/publications/journal/vol1_2/1_3.html

4. All statements delivered during the WSIS are available at http://www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/coverage/statements/

5. Statements made at the UN meetings or their summaries are available at www.un.org under the relevant items.

6. Daoud Kuttab, Bridging the Digital Divide: Non traditional alternatives. Daoud Kuttab, an award winning Arab journalist, is the director of the Arab world's first Internet-based radio station- AmmanNet. http://www.amin.org/eng/daoud_kuttab/2004/feb05.html February 5, 2004.

7. See http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2003/05/264373.shtml

8. The working group is to report before the next phase of the Summit in Tunis in November 2005. The forum is accessible at www.wsis-online.net/igov-forum.

9. Statements made by the UN Secretary-General are available at www.un.org under the relevant items.

10. Preparatory meetings and work-shops organized by various convenors allow a large diversity of actors to engage in open consultations before the formation of this group. In this perspective, an International Telecommunication Union workshop in Geneva on 26-27 February 2004 (see www.itu.int/osg/spu/forum/intgov04) and an Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers workshop in Rome on 4 March 2004 (See www.icann.org/meetings/rome/wsis-workshop04mar04.html) already took place, and other meetings are planned.

11. Wsis-online.net is the online community platform for all actors willing to implement the Action Plan adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society. It offers a calendar of events, and provides information on people, organizations and projects involved in building the information society, indexed through a list of summit themes. To know more about this multi-stakeholder effort, visit: www.wsis-online.net

12. The Task Force contributes to the preparations for the second phase of the Summit leading up to the Tunis conference (16-18 November 2005). For more information, please visit www.unicttaskforce.org.

13. All materials dealing with the positions expressed by the European

Union at the WSIS and during its preparatory process are easily accessible at http://europa.eu.int/information_society/index_en.htm.

14. The full text of the *Bucharest Declaration* is availble at www.wsis-romania.ro.

15. For details see http://www.whois.sc/news/2003-12/un-icann.html

16. See "UN not to take control of Internet" http://sacha.rdix.com/archives/00000008.html

17. The material about solidarity was summarized on the basis of a more detailed presentation available on the web-site of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs accessible at http://www.denmark.dk

18. For details about the preparation of the Tunis Summit see http://www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory2/hammamet/index.html

19. Statements of Dr. Kim-Hak Su, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) are available at http://www.unescap.org/oes/statement.asp

20. This Declaration was adopted at the conclusion of the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference and was submitted as the Asia-Pacific region's input to the WSIS process. The Conference recognized the importance of the declaration and plan of action resulting from the WSIS process, taking into account internationally agreed goals, including those of the Millennium Declaration.http://www.wsis-japan.jp/documents/tokyodeclaration.html

21. See J. P. Muldoon et al (eds), *Multilateral diplomacy and the United Nations today*, Boulder, COL, Westview, 1999.

22. The quotation is taken from the electronic version of the book mentioned under note 21. In a new book entitled *The Architecture of Global Governance: An introduction to the study of international organizations*, Boulder, COL, Westview, 2004, at p.267 J.P. Muldoon, Jr. emphasizes that the digital divide "may not be bridged by throwing computers and software at the problem, but by bringing ICTs to bear in development strategies and poverty reduction programs the gap will certainly be narrowed to the benefit of all."

23. The motto of the present pontificate could be phrased as *OPUS SOLIDARITATIS PAX*: Peace is the fruit of solidarity. See in that regard www.lilt.ilstu.edu/jguegu/social visited on 5 April 2004.

24. For the full text of the statement see http://www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/coverage/statements/finland/fi.html visited on 5 April 2004. For a relevant academic analysis of these issues see Tehranian, M., *Global communications and world politics: domination, development, and discourse* (Boulder, Col., Rienner, 1999).

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