

Editorial

ICT Drives Information Societies

During a complex preparatory process, it was uncertain whether the first World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) could really succeed. Fifty-four heads of state and government, ministers, and vice ministers from 176 countries met in Geneva on December 10–12, reached a significant consensus on the importance of ICT in the drive toward Information Societies. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan told world leaders “technology has given birth to the information age, now it’s up to all of us to build an information society.” Overcoming many divergent views on how to reduce the digital divide and priorities for economic and social development, the Summit “committed to implementing comprehensive, forward looking and sustainable national e-strategies.”

Perhaps more impressive than the Declaration of Guiding Principles agreed by all delegations were the commitments to ICT, personally presented by world leaders. Leaders from developing countries reflecting far different political ideologies and stages of economic advancement described how achieving Information Societies is directly linked to ICT strategies and implementation programs. This issue of I-Ways, which was represented at WSIS, presents excerpts from addresses by 31 countries in which they describe national ICT priorities. Leaders of countries as diverse as Pakistan, Nigeria, Estonia, Tonga and Jamaica describe their vision of ICT being the chosen “road to development.”

Egypt’s President Hosny Mubarak spoke of transforming Egyptian society into a knowledge-based society. “Our leading initiatives include the use of ICT in upgrading education standards, improving health service services, speeding our efforts toward E-Government, and facilitating E-Business transactions.” The Prime Minister of Bangladesh said her government believes “ICT offers a unique opportunity to attain human development and socio-economic targets set by the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. It provides a chance for the poorer countries to narrow the gap with the developed world.” The Prime Minister of Romania stated: “I consider that the WSIS represents a great opportunity for clarifying and facilitating the consensus on key issues of the knowledge-based society, founded on large public-private partnerships.”

Reflecting the realities of the development gap for many countries, King Letsie of Lesotho pointed out that his country like most developing countries, “is still at an infancy stage of ICT. The widening digital divide between North and South remains a matter of grave concern to us. It is my government’s humble submission that the quest for an information society should be pursued as a global initiative if mankind as a whole, is to reap the full benefits thereof.”

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