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REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE WORLD SUMMIT ON
INFORMATION SOCIETY

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THE WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY**

INTRODUCTION

The Maputo Summit in July 2003 adopted EX/CL/Dec.61 (III) on the World Summit on Information Society. The principal activities devolving on the Commission are as follows:

- Contribute actively to the process of the Summit with a view to forging a common understanding of an Information Society and on a just, comprehensive and sustainable development project;
- Participate actively in the preparatory process and in the Summit which will be organized in two phases: Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005, and enhance its visibility in the process.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST PHASE

The first phase of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) was held from 10 to 12 December 2003 in Geneva (Switzerland). The Summit was attended by many Heads of State and Government including African Heads of State and Government. The first phase of the Summit culminated in a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action.

The contents of the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action are underpinned by a certain number of basic principles and essential values. These are the universality of all rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development enshrined in the Vienna Declaration, equal sovereignty of all States, freedom and plurality of the press, respect for and protection of cultural diversity and identity, respect for and protection of underprivileged and vulnerable social groups, ethnic minorities, etc.

Furthermore, the two documents revolved around the following topics:

- The need to design and establish infrastructure, networks and services that are easily accessible at affordable costs, facilitating the use of ICT in the development efforts of Nations;
- The need for each nation to strengthen its capacities through education, training and research, thus being able to participate in the Information Society;
- The need to ensure network and information security in order to build the trust of the user in ICTs and contribute notably to combating the use of ICTs for criminal purposes and terrorism;
- The establishment of an environment conducive, at all levels (national, regional and international), to the development of ICTs. This will entail, among other things, accepting the intervention of government authorities to fill the gaps in the market;
- Considering the issue of Internet Governance mainly in terms of international, multilateral, transparent and democratic management of the Internet network;
- Subscription to the Digital Solidarity Pact proposed as a pledge of international cooperation in the area of ICTs, while Africa at the initiative of the President of the Senegal, called for the creation of a «Digital Solidarity Fund».

REPORT ON AFRICA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE WSIS

The Ministerial Conference convened by the President of Nigeria, Olusegun OBASANJO and held under the high patronage of President Abdoulaye WADE in Dakar, from 19 to 20 April 2004, reviewed the participation of the Continent in the first phase of the WSIS.

Firstly, the Conference was of the opinion that overall performance was moderate. Indeed, although compromises were reached on certain issues such as the reference to the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity, the need to promote the security of ICT networks, guaranteeing intellectual property in the ICT domain, development of free software and the role of the media in the information society, there are still points of divergence, the most important of which is Internet governance and financing ICT development.

Concerning the Digital Solidarity Fund proposed by Africa, the first phase of the Summit recognized the rights of States who so wish to establish this Fund. Moreover, other countries, including those of the European Union, the USA, Japan, Canada, etc, were granted the possibility of first conducting a study on existing financing mechanisms.

The Internet governance system, its procedures and its management organ could also not be agreed on by participants. While developed countries generally preferred the current method of management by a private association (ICANN) established in the USA, developing countries, the majority of which were African countries, advocated management by public authorities.

The report by the Dakar meeting also noted the lack of coordination of preparatory activities at continental level. The Conference observed that the Ministers were not really involved in the preparation of the Summit and had left it to experts. This, the Conference felt, had a negative impact on the effectiveness of Africa's participation in the first phase of the Summit.

PREPARATION OF THE SECOND PHASE OF THE SUMMIT (TUNIS 2005)

The preparation of the second phase of the Summit slated for Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005 is underway. This preparation is taking place simultaneously in:

- New York, where two working groups were established by the United Nations Secretary General; one on Internet governance, the other on financing ICT development;
- Geneva, where a group of negotiators was established to contribute to the preparation of the second phase. This group comprises six (6) representatives per region. The countries

representing Africa in the group are Mali, Kenya, Senegal, Egypt, Libya and Zambia. In addition to these six countries, there is Tunisia in its capacity as the host of the Summit.

- Africa, where the mechanism put in place by African countries to prepare the second phase of the WSIS is composed as follows:
 - o Bamako Group, comprising experts, which already met in February 2004, in Addis Ababa. This group had already contributed greatly to the preparation of the first phase.
 - o Civil Society Liaison Committee, whose first meeting was held in Tunis from 11 to 14 April 2004.
 - o The Ministerial Committee established in Dakar. It comprises eight (8) countries, namely, Tunisia, Ghana, Senegal and a representative of each of the five (5) regions. The role of the Ministerial Committee is to supervise the preparatory activities and ensure greater involvement of Ministers in the preparation of the second phase.

The first official meeting of the Preparatory Committee (Prep. Com) will take place in Tunis from 24 to 26 June 2004. This meeting will discuss, *inter alia*:

- The overall preparatory process;
- The objectives of the second phase;
- Follow-up on the decisions of the first phase;
- Outstanding issues such as financing and Internet governance;
- The nature and substance of the document which could be adopted in Tunis.

It should be pointed out that Ghana has offered to host the African Regional Preparatory Conference, while The Gambia has

offered to organize a seminar on the evaluation of the results of the first phase and progress made since the holding of this first phase.

SUGGESTIONS

At the end of the first phase of the Summit, it is needful for Africa to put in place national, sub-regional and continental policies for the development and use of ICTs for its growth and the welfare of its peoples. These policies should, among other things, take into account a fiscal regime and specific bank aid to promote ICTs in Africa, thereby facilitating the acquisition of equipment, the installation of infrastructure and the creation of low cost services and products. Furthermore, research, education and training should be encouraged.

With regard to the Digital Solidarity Fund, for the time being, it is the cities of Geneva, Turin and Lyon that are at the leading edge. In Africa, Senegal, the initiator of the original proposal, remains the driving force behind the concretisation/realization of the Fund. The African Union should support this initiative.

At African level, the institutional mechanism responsible for the preparation of the second phase does not seem to have a real coordination centre; thus, the central role of the African Union Commission is becoming increasingly apparent and essential. The Commission should therefore have adequate means to better prepare the Continent's participation in the second phase of the Summit.

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