

Strengthening Cooperation, Promoting Development and Moving Towards the Information Society¹

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In today's world, information technologies and information industry have promoted social productivity, improved people's living standard, transformed people's mode of production and lifestyle so much that humankind is moving towards the Information Society.

As a developing country, China attaches great importance to the information industry. It is implementing a leapfrog development strategy characterised by the mutual reinforcement of informatization and industrialization, which has yielded positive results. With an annual addition of over 90 million in recent years, China now has over 500 million telephone subscribers and more than 78 million Internet users. Electronic and information products manufacturing has become a fairly large industry. In China, hundreds of millions of households are using TVs, phones and the Internet, reaping more and more benefits from informatization. Information industry has developed into a leading pillar and basic industry of China's national economy and is playing a significant role in the social and economic development.

We believe that the Information Society is the result of human civilization and progress. As such, it should be a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive society, which benefits all peoples and countries. However, we should not fail, in the process of economic globalisation and ICT development, to see the increasing disparity in wealth and the enlarging "digital divide" between the developed and developing countries, and the least developed countries facing the risk of being marginalized in the information area. The international community should get ready actively to meet this challenge. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of my observations in this regard.

¹ Based on a statement made at the Plenary Meeting of WSIS, Geneva, December, 10, 2003

First, coordinated economic and social development is essential to building the Information Society. Without properly tackling the fundamental issue of development, we will get nowhere. In the first 20 years of this century, China will be devoted to building a well-off society in an all-around way which will benefit hundreds of millions of people, featuring a more developed economy, improved democracy, higher level of science and education, thriving culture, social harmony and a better life. China will also speed up rural economic development, continue to implement the strategy of developing its western region and revitalize the old industrial bases in the north-east and other areas so as to achieve balanced development between urban and rural areas as well as in different regions. In the information and communications field, China will go all out to enable more people to benefit from informatization and industrialization by improving the information infrastructure and the capability of the manufacturing sector, promoting the use of information technologies, developing communications in rural areas and providing universal service.

Second, a peaceful, stable, fair and reasonable international development environment is a must for building the Information Society. The international community should pay attention to the interests of the increasingly marginalized disadvantaged countries and groups, and lead the economic globalization towards a direction that enables all-win results and coexistence among different countries and groups. The developing countries should, through their own efforts, explore development modes of the Information Society that suit their own national conditions, and China will work unremittingly toward this end. We call on the developed countries to fulfill their obligations to render active and effective help in providing capital, technologies and human resources to enable the developing countries to keep up with the pace of development of the global information network. Governments, related international organizations, private sectors and civil societies should be encouraged to strengthen cooperation in building the Information Society and bridging the digital divide. We appeal for more participation and coordination by intergovernmental organizations in such issues as Internet-related public policies to create a favourable international environment for the development of the Internet.

Third, efforts should be made to build up a harmonious, inclusive and coexistent information society. While freedom of speech should be guaranteed and human dignity and rights safeguarded by law and system, social responsibilities and obligations should also be advocated. The international community should fully respect the differences in social systems and cultural diversity. This is the basic norm for building the Information Society.

Fourth, an important guarantee for building the Information Society is to build more information networks and strengthen information security. Efforts should be made to

strengthen infrastructure, promote the use of ICTs and aggressively develop the Internet. Measures should be taken to actively and effectively prevent the use of information technologies and resources for pornographic, violent and terrorist purposes as well as for criminal activities endangering national security so as to ensure the healthy development of information and networks.

The Chinese Government is ready to join hands with other countries to quicken the pace towards the Information Society and to materialize the blueprint set out in the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations.