Serving Citizens: e-Government for Everybody[1]

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We see the Information Society as a global society; a society in which we have the opportunity to communicate better with each other; a society allowing us to learn more about each other and from each other's experiences.

The term "Information Society" was adopted by the European Union at an early stage. It is a concept that we have come to appreciate, that we value and that has become a basis for our lives. The Political Declaration agreed at the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society constitutes a common vision for the development of a global Information Society. It will be based on:

- The respect for our common fundamental values, such as human rights, freedom of access to information and the empowerment that the Internet gives to disadvantaged groups;

- The respect for diversity at all levels – linguistic and cultural. This diversity is an expression of the differences between peoples and societies all over the world;

- A pro-competitive legal and regulatory framework. This can mobilise investment and foster growth and development, based on market forces; and

- Policies taking into account the need for solidarity and social cohesion.

As a partner, we are already discussing this in our bilateral and multilateral engagements. As a major donor, we are mainstreaming ICTs and increasing these commitments in accordance

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with our partners' priorities. And as a participant in the WSIS, the European Union has given ample proof of its commitment to this Summit during the preparatory process.

The Information Society concerns all citizens and not only a fifth of the world's population. This constitutes two major challenges for the coming fifteen years:

Firstly, how do we mobilise ICTs to contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and to bridging the digital divide? Here, I believe that efforts focused on e-learning, e-health and e-government can make a real difference for citizens.

Secondly, how do we enable many more citizens of the world to participate in the Information Society? This means creating the conditions for affordable access and services. Furthermore, this opens new perspectives for private public partnerships to develop new technological solutions and new models for encouraging the take-up of those solutions.

Today we have transformed the principles agreed at the Geneva Summit into a Plan of Action. This concerns a wide range of topics such as access to information and knowledge, capacity-building, ICT applications, enabling environment, e-commerce, security and so forth. Here civil society and the private sector play a pivotal role. The Summit rightly recognises the principle of digital solidarity. We have agreed on an agenda, which fully mobilises the potential for future cooperation.

I consider the Plan of Action endorsed at the Geneva Summit as a point of departure. It could give renewed impetus to the development of a truly global Information Society for all. It is an invitation for stronger cooperation and new partnerships. It shows the value of international and multilateral mechanisms.

This Summit will give new incentives to citizens world-wide. It will contribute to economic growth. It is a new adventure. It marks the development of a new frontier very different from frontiers in the territorial sense. It is a Cyberspace – a space without limits, except those of our creativity and imagination.