SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN GENEVA
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We thank the Government and people of Tunisia for hosting this summit, under the leadership of President Zen Alibidine Ben Ali, to launch global information society from the soil of Africa for the common good of humanity. We thank you for your generous hospitality. We are also grateful to the ITU for providing the intellectual and administrative support and to the United Nations for helping define the context of the second phase of the Summit.

While my delegation enjoys the warmth and comfort of this beautiful city, our thoughts are with hundreds of thousands of people in Pakistan and other parts of South Asia. They were   hit and made homeless by a ferocious earthquake last month and exposed to the harsh elements of nature – snow, freezing temperatures – and more – a treacherous terrain, aftershocks, disease. Nearly 74, 000 people have died; more than 70, 000 are seriously injured. Children were hit the hardest.

Even as I speak, Pakistan is trying to save lives through round the clock relief operations. It is because of this catastrophe that our leaders are not in your midst. Our Government is hosting an international conference on November 19 to prepare plans to regenerate life and livelihoods; to reconstruct broken villages, towns and cities.

It is in this hour of dark tragedy that we realised the real value of the Internet, the media, and mobile telephones. While existing networks reacted with speed, several new websites sprung overnight to collect casualty and patient data, to assess damage, and to direct rescue and relief efforts with precision. In the first hours of the tragedy, in some instances, the only contact of the people trapped in inaccessible regions was through mobile phones. Rescue missions, hospitals, relief teams all used this data. Governments, civil society, private sector, international organisations all participated in the operations. This was global information society in action responding to a natural calamity of colossal proportions.

To face this challenge, Pakistan was in the driving seat thanks to our leadership's vision to take steps towards a seamless integration into the information society. President General Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz have been directing this national endeavour.

Over the years, education in basic sciences, mathematics, and English has helped produce a talent pool of IT executives and prepare our young citizens to embrace the information revolution.

The trendlines in Information Technology are good. London's *Financial Times* in its recent special report on Investing in Pakistan terms it "arguably one of the four to five most dynamic economies

in the area". The economy is performing strongly, with GDP growth in the past year at 8.4% and projected to grow at the same level in the current year. Investment regime is the most liberal in the region. Pakistan is fast becoming the favoured new offshore IT destination and "a median point" between South, Central and West Asia.

The Government is acting as an enabler for the growth of ICT. A host of goals are being pursued under a separate, dynamic IT Ministry. These include massive investment in education, training, especially IT/virtual universities; infrastructure development; increasing teledensity and universalising access to the Internet. We have set up portals to give access to students and teachers to worldwide academic databases, books and journals. Pakistan Education and Research Network (PERN) is a pioneering effort for collaborative research and content sharing, linking up all public and private universities. ICT is being integrated into all levels of education. Computer labs and teachers have been provided in 1100 high schools throughout the country.

In Pakistan, the number of the Internet users is growing fast. Monthly costs for Internet bandwidth for the consumer have been reduced drastically and bandwidth capacity increased. Internet access expanded from 29 cities in 2000 to 1,862 cities and towns this year. Optical-fiber networks are available in more than 300 cities, compared to 53 in 2000. There are some 131 Internet service providers.

Laws relating to cyber crimes have been submitted to the cabinet. Several software entities are implementing programmes to activate the local information-technology (IT) sector and to incubate small software companies. Software-technology parks have been established to build up the IT industry in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi.

IT companies will enjoy income tax exemption on software-export revenues until 2016. Computers and related hardware have been exempted from duties, taxes and surcharges. Accreditation and Quality Testing Councils are working to monitor and enforce a high standard of IT education in both private and public sectors.

The telecom sector has grown rapidly and is poised to expand immensely. With only 2.3 in 2002, teledensity rises to nearly 16 this year in mobile and landline telephones. We are attracting significant foreign investment from Europe, North America and the Gulf, as we privatize shares of Pakistan Telecommunications. A foreign company has recently announced to set up a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) in Pakistan. Call centers are now franchising into the neighborhood markets. Outsourcing is taking off.

Affordability of ICT is a priority for Pakistan. Healthy competition reduces costs of goods and services. We, however, believe that more needs to be done in the areas of innovation and research to extend the benefits of ICT to the common man in developing countries. The cost of software licenses continues to be a major impediment in bridging the digital divide. Pakistan has created an Open Source Resource Centre to help in providing low cost alternatives. We invite other counties to collaborate in the research and development of free and open source software. Africa's continuing leadership on affordability initiatives has reinforced efforts of countries like Pakistan.

Information technology is changing the landscape of the country. Internet cafés, private TV channels, and the use of computers by grass root communities in some parts - have revolutionized expectations. These information tools are being used to fight poverty, disease and illiteracy as well as to promote tolerance. Web content in our national language Urdu and local languages enriches culture, preserves classical and modern prose and poetry, and stimulates native genius to contribute to globalized decision making.

Freedom of expression is no more a privilege; it is an imperative for developing societies. We have a vibrant civil society and a robust private sector collaborating in the task of nation building.

Mr. President,

We agree with Secretary General Kofi Annan that this Summit should be a summit of solutions. The Internet has changed lives of hundreds of millions of people. This wind of change must now sweep through poor countries and poorer segments of societies. But information is not just an economic tool. We need its infinite power to combat the rising tide of hate and prejudice pitting nation against nation, faith against faith and civilization against civilization. We will use the Internet and other media to heal wounds, to remove misperceptions, to promote dialogue, to foster trust between diverse communities and to reverse the onslaught of extremism and terrorism.

Pakistan had the honour to chair the Subcommittee on Internet Governance. All stakeholders made difficult decisions as we negotiated. Through collective will, we were able to draw up a road map for the future, which now awaits the final approval of world leaders assembled here. It is a good beginning. Let's follow it up. Together, we shall use the Information Revolution - exploding in multiple mediums, languages, and geographical spaces - to develop our societies, to pursue connectivity, to fight spam and cybercrime, and to create common platforms for the benefit of mankind.

Mr. President,

I will close this statement with the announcement that Pakistan will host the next Asia Pacific Telecommunity General Assembly in Islamabad from November 30 to December 8, 2005. Invitations have been issued. Preparations are in full swing. We welcome Telecommunity leaders from Asia and the Pacific to assemble in Pakistan to take important decisions soon after this historic Summit on information society.

I thank you, Mr. President.