

ECLAC  
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Regional Preparatory Ministerial Conference of Latin America and the  
Caribbean for the World Summit on the Information Society

Bávaro, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, 29-31 January 2003

## **BÁVARO DECLARATION**

The countries represented at the Regional Preparatory Ministerial Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean for the World Summit on the Information Society, held with the collaboration of ECLAC, understand that:

The information society is an economic and social system where knowledge and information constitute the fundamental sources of well-being and progress and that it represents an opportunity for our countries and societies, so long as it is understood that the development of that society within a global and local context requires a deeper appreciation of fundamental principles such as those of respect for human rights within the broader context of fundamental rights, democracy, environmental protection, the advancement of peace, the right to development, fundamental freedoms, economic progress and social equity. The countries of the region feel that the firm advocacy of their views and priorities in world forums, including the World Summit on the Information Society (2003-2005), should be a key component of the region's strategy on the information society.

Our countries, aware of the need to generate equal opportunities for access and use of information and communication technologies, are committed to taking action to overcome the digital divide, which both reflects and is a factor in the differences that exist between and within countries in terms of economic, social and cultural aspects, education, health and access to knowledge.

We believe that access to information technologies and their appropriate use should be a fundamental concern of our countries which will help to foster ties of friendship based on the principle of equal rights.

The countries of the region represented at the Regional Preparatory Ministerial Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean for the World Summit on the Information Society, bearing in mind the Millennium Declaration and resolution 56/183 as adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session,

1. Adopt the following guiding principles:
  - (a) The social and economic progress of the countries and the well-being of persons and communities shall occupy a central place in activities aimed at building an information society. The use and benefit of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are in order to satisfy the needs of individuals, communities and society in general;
  - (b) The information society shall be oriented towards eliminating existing socio-economic differences in our societies, averting the emergence of new forms of exclusion and becoming a positive force for all of the world's people by helping to reduce the disparity between developed and developing countries, as well as within countries;
  - (c) The information society should serve the public interest and the aim of social well-being by contributing to the eradication of poverty, the creation of wealth, the promotion and enhancement of social development, democratic participation, linguistic diversity and cultural identity, while at the same time ensuring equal opportunities for gaining access to information and communication technologies and at all times upholding the principle of legality to ensure its efficient and orderly use;
  - (d) Universal access to information and communication technologies shall be an objective of all the stakeholders involved in building the information society, in accordance with the legal framework in force in each country;
  - (e) The effort to build an information society shall encompass access to information and communication technologies, the utilization of these technologies through the articulation of local, regional and global actions, and their use for public and social purposes in such areas as government, health care and learning;
  - (f) The integration of all socially vulnerable sectors, including, but not limited to, older adults, children, rural communities, indigenous peoples, differently abled persons, the unemployed, displaced persons and migrants shall be a priority objective in building the information society. To that end, barriers to participation, such as illiteracy, the lack of user training, cultural and linguistic constraints and particular conditions of access to the relevant technology, shall be overcome;

- (g) Information and communication technologies foster the flow and exchange of information, encourage the transfer of knowledge and stimulate innovation and human capital formation while helping to ensure that a free flow of information coexists with respect for life, private property, privacy, intellectual property, confidentiality and security;
- (h) The transition to the information society shall be led by the Governments in close coordination with private enterprise and civil society. An integral approach shall be taken that provides for an open and participatory dialogue with the whole of society in order to incorporate all stakeholders involved in the process of building a common vision for the development of an information society in the region;
- (i) The information society is intrinsically global in nature. Thus, a policy dialogue based on global trends in the information society should take place at the world, regional and subregional levels in order to facilitate:
- The provision of technical assistance aimed at national and regional capacity-building for the maintenance and reinforcement of regional and international cooperation;
  - The sharing of best practices;
  - The sharing of knowledge; and
  - The development of compatible regulations and standards that respect national characteristics and concerns;
- (j) Access to information and communication technologies shall be secured in accordance with international law, bearing in mind that some countries are affected by unilateral measures which are not compatible with it and which create obstacles for international trade.\*
- (k) The existence of independent and free communication media, in accordance with the legal system of each country, is an essential requirement for freedom of expression and a guarantee of the plurality of information. Unhindered access by individuals and communication media to information sources shall be ensured and strengthened in order to promote the existence of vigorous public opinion as a pillar of civil responsibility in accordance with article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international and regional instruments dealing with human rights;

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\* See the end of this document for the reservations that have been entered concerning this paragraph.

- (l) Access by countries to the benefits of the digital revolution requires adherence to the universally accepted principles of non-discrimination within the framework of negotiations based on a spirit of justice and equity;
2. Also adopt the following priority issues:
- (a) Promoting and strengthening national programmes for the development of the information society based on proactive national strategies. The main stakeholders in the information society shall be identified and encouraged to participate in national activities. In addition, the role, responsibilities and goals of such activities must be clearly defined. With support at the highest political level, it is essential that steps be taken to foster close collaboration among public agencies and programmes while also ensuring that non-governmental organizations, the private sector, civil society and academic institutions make a significant contribution to the process and the continuity of such initiatives;
  - (b) Promoting the build-out of information and communication technology infrastructure and technological innovation. Universal access policies shall promote the best possible level of connectivity at a reasonable cost for under-served areas. Technological convergence must be monitored with a view to integrating traditional and new ICTs in order to create alternative forms of access that can help narrow the digital divide. The creation and provision of low-cost access equipment and multi-purpose community access points shall be an integral part of the agenda for reducing the digital divide. The digital transition in the radio broadcasting sector shall take into account the possibilities of each country so as to permit the adoption of compatible systems that can coexist with analog transmission, as well as type approval of common standards;
  - (c) Improving access services. The provision of access to telecommunications infrastructure at a reasonable cost, including broadband systems, the strengthening of the national software and services industry, the adjustment of international agencies' policies on tenders in order to permit the participation of qualified local industries, and development strategies are key elements in reducing the digital divide. The application of information and communication technologies in organizational units of interest to society, such as universities and research institutions, hospitals and clinics, small and medium-sized enterprises, schools, municipalities and other institutions shall, in view of the role they perform in society, be placed at the top of the connectivity agenda;

- (d) Guaranteeing that human rights, including the right to development, are protected and promoted in the information society. All persons have the right to freedom of thought and expression; this right includes the freedom to maintain opinions without interference and to seek out, receive and share information and ideas through any communication media, subject to national laws and international agreements. The exercise of this right will be facilitated by educational opportunities for all;
- (e) Managing the radioelectric spectrum in the public and general interest and in accordance with the basic principle of legality, with full observance of national laws and regulations and international agreements governing the management of frequencies;
- (f) Adopting suitable regulatory frameworks that provide for the existence of sound, independent regulatory agencies that will ensure access to terminal equipment, networks, services and software markets under conditions of competitiveness, quality, diversity and state-of-the-art technologies. Competition shall be promoted as the best way to drive down prices and to ensure the ongoing modernization of networks and services. Given the importance of technical standards in the development of the information society, the countries of the region shall regularly carry out in-depth economic and technical analyses to make sure that the regional information society is neither locked out of global trends nor locked into particular technological solutions. Consideration shall be given to open source-code standards, services and models;
- (g) Establishing appropriate national legislative frameworks that safeguard the public and general interest and intellectual property and that foster electronic communications and transactions. Protection from civil and criminal offences (“cybercrime”), settlement and clearance issues, network security and assurance of the confidentiality of personal information are essential in order to build trust in information networks. Multilateral, transparent and democratic Internet governance should form part of this effort, taking into account the needs of the public and private sectors, as well as those of civil society;
- (h) Fostering the efficient use of infrastructure. The optimization of connections among major information networks should be promoted through the creation of regional traffic hubs to reduce interconnection costs and allow the penetration of access networks to be broadened. Fees for the use of networks and infrastructure shall be set on the basis of objective, non-discriminatory parameters;

- (i) Seeking out ways of financing activities directed towards building an information society within a national development context. Proactive policies should be aimed at encouraging private and public investment in connectivity and ICT services. It is necessary to secure the participation of business enterprises in the development and implementation of national and regional development priorities and projects in order to create a virtuous circle that will not only attract and retain business enterprises in the region, but also boost local activity having a greater technological content. The public sector should explore innovative ways to correct market failures and bring the information society to all sectors of the economy and society, especially to those living in poverty. Legislation and domestic, regional and international financing mechanisms can provide the foundations for setting up new high-technology firms and enabling small and medium-sized enterprises to finance, on a competitive basis, the capital-intensive process of introducing information and communication systems into their organizational structures. National financing mechanisms can be strengthened if, by legitimate means, developing countries generate their own resources by placing their export products on all markets, free of protectionist barriers to international trade. Structural adjustment programmes should not jeopardize the development of the information society;
- (j) Reinforcing the development of a sufficient supply of qualified human capital. It is essential to disseminate information regarding the potential of new technologies through the exchange of information on best practices, campaigns, pilot projects, demonstrations and public discussions. “E-literacy” courses should be aimed at training the population in the use of information and communication technologies, and these courses should provide ICT users with the skills they need to utilize and produce useful and socially meaningful content for the benefit of all socio-economic levels. The formation and maintenance of a workforce to act as a pillar of the information society shall be undertaken in close cooperation with the private sector and civil society in general;
- (k) Emphasizing the education of key users of information and communication technologies, including but not limited to teachers, civil servants, physicians, nurses and community leaders. Incentives shall be created to encourage adaptation to new forms of communication and interaction. The countries must endeavour to minimize the common problem of skill mismatches by actively seeking out suitable professional profiles and constantly updating textbooks;

- (l) Promoting the development of high-quality local material and the local utilization of existing global material while respecting intellectual property rights. Solutions that address national needs can ensure the participation of the whole of society, provide opportunities for sensitization and local capacity-building and make the voice of the region heard in the information society. Steps should be taken to promote broad-based, inclusive access to the information society for the population, not only as consumers or users, but also as stakeholders or full-fledged participants, that is to say, as suppliers, innovators, creators and originators of content and applications. The creation and preservation of indigenous, local and traditional knowledge and the promotion of multilingualism in cyberspace are fundamental. To these ends, the best possible use must be made of resources by sharing socially useful software applications and content;
- (m) Encouraging the development of businesses based on information and communication technologies and, in particular, e-commerce. Priority shall be placed on strengthening local microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises through their integration into the digital economy. Public policies must foster innovation and entrepreneurship. The development of technology-based firms shall be encouraged through such mechanisms as venture capital funds, technology parks and business incubators, together with the participation of academic institutions and research networks. In addition, special mechanisms shall be put in place to encourage the banking sector to develop secure and reliable applications to facilitate online transactions. Measures are needed that will encompass a broad array of instruments, including the use of information technologies in customs systems, management systems and transport optimization, in order to facilitate, streamline and harmonize e-commerce, which must be accompanied, as an essential component, by improved market access opportunities for developing countries. The modernization of physical infrastructure and regulatory frameworks and the training of human resources can contribute to a substantial increase in commercial efficiency and create a climate of trust through the adoption of effective consumer protection legislation;
- (n) Enhancing public-sector performance through the adoption of e-government tools for the sector's modernization and good governance. The steps taken to this end shall reflect an approach that combines electronic information-based services for citizens (e-government) and the provision of online services for the public with the reinforcement of participatory elements (e-democracy). It is necessary to find avenues for the integration and linkage of the

various public-sector authorities that will permit the establishment of a one-stop user window to provide citizen-oriented e-government services. It is also necessary to emphasize the importance of citizen access to information on public administration for citizen participation, transparency and accountability in government activities. Special e-government applications shall be designed and used to serve as a catalyst in encouraging firms and individuals to prefer online transactions;

- (o) Incorporating the use of information and communication technologies on a mass scale in the field of health care with a view to improving resource use, patient satisfaction, personalized care, and the coordination of public health-care systems, private institutions and the academic sector. Innovative solutions and options must be devised for providing health services to under-served areas. Another e-health priority shall be the prevention, treatment and control of the spread of diseases;
- (p) Developing and implementing networks, progress performance measures and innovative e-learning mechanisms. The introduction and development of ICTs in various schools and other learning institutions shall be supported through the establishment and maintenance of a human resources network that institutionalizes the ongoing training of teachers and instructors, who are the backbone of innovation. Advantage shall be taken of best practices to create high-quality, readily accessible teaching material from all over the world to deal with the problem of information overload and facilitate knowledge transfer to the national level. The development of a capacity for critical analysis of material available in cyberspace shall form part of this effort. Special attention shall be devoted to multilingual training and to the use and development of translation software. Priority shall be placed on expanding the networking capabilities of regional research institutions by consolidating advanced academic networks and reinforcing national innovation systems through digital networks;
- (q) Strengthening the multimedia sector in the countries. This sector performs a very valuable economic, social, cultural and political function in the information society. The reinforcement and expansion of the countries' culture industries are of great importance for the region's presence and visibility in the global information society and for the reaffirmation of the region's multicultural identity;
- (r) Reinforcing international cooperation in all the above-mentioned areas. Close international cooperation among national authorities, stakeholders and international organizations in all aspects of the

information society is more vital today than ever and, to this end, advantage shall be taken of the opportunities offered by regional financial institutions. The international community is called upon to provide technical and financial cooperation at both the multilateral and bilateral levels. The countries represented at the Conference reaffirm the need for the developed countries to make available the official development assistance (ODA) commitments which they announced at the International Conference on Financing for Development. It is necessary for all countries to comply with all aspects of the consensus reached at that conference. The countries represented at the Conference call upon those developed countries that have not already done so to take concrete action to fulfil the target level of 0.7% of their GDP as official development assistance;

- (s) Establishing regional and subregional working groups on specific topics can allow for a smoother, more coherent and harmonious transition to the information society, permit the deployment of regional integration efforts and help to increase bargaining power at the international level. The Latin American and Caribbean countries are committed, as a matter of priority, to more active participation in global forums as well as in existing regional and subregional institutions. They are also committed to the formation of new and transformation of existing international partnerships through, inter alia, the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Network (LacNet) of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force. In this regard, the countries of the region call upon the international community to adopt appropriate, creative mechanisms to ensure the full participation and representation of the region in these forums in order to guarantee the widest possible contribution to the process of configuring the global information society;
- (t) Invoking the use of ICTs as a tool for environmental preservation and sustainability and, in that regard, promoting their use for disaster mitigation and prevention, bearing in mind the vulnerability of the entire region, particularly small island States with fragile ecosystems;
- (u) Furthering and promoting the development and establishment of performance evaluation and dissemination systems and mechanisms that include community measures and indicators that reflect the efforts and progress made by the countries of the region in establishing facilities for ICT access and use within a community context;

- (v) Devoting special attention to the adoption of strategies and policies to facilitate the penetration of information technologies for the promotion of exports and investment in the region;

The aforementioned principles and priority issues shall be presented as the region's contribution to the preparatory process for the World Summit on the Information Society and its follow-up and may assist the Governments to shape policies and take the necessary steps to build the information society.

The participants in the Regional Preparatory Ministerial Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean for the World Summit on the Information Society, held with the collaboration of ECLAC, are grateful to the Government of the Dominican Republic for having organized the Conference and invite it to present this Declaration as a contribution to the preparatory process for the World Summit on the Information Society and to the first phase of the Summit, to be held in December 2003.

Finally, the International Telecommunication Union, other relevant agencies and, particularly at the regional level, ECLAC are asked to support the countries in following up on the agreements adopted in this Declaration and in implementing the conclusions and recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society.

**Reservations concerning paragraph 1.j:**

Statement of the United States: "The United States of America reserves on the text of paragraph 1j and submits its objection to the language, which is inappropriate and is inconsistent with the purpose of the Conference."

Statement of Canada: "Canada appreciates the efforts of the Host Government and other Governments to achieve a consensus text for paragraph 1j. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, Canada cannot associate itself with the final text of that paragraph."