



**Statement  
by**

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and  
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Least Developed Countries,  
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**on**

**Item 44:**

**Information and communications technologies for  
development**

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Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished delegates,

The Declaration adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society outlines a common vision of an inclusive and people-centred information society, in which all citizens should be able to create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge. It also recognizes that information and communication technologies are a fundamental tool to foster social and economic development. Under agenda item 44, the Second Committee will be discussing the very topical issue of information and communication technologies for development. While the electronic media has come to be recognized universally as the medium for progress, the other side of the reality is that there are millions of people living in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) without even basic electricity.

When the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries was adopted in 2001, policies and measures were articulated “to foster an enabling environment to facilitate the acquisition and development of technology and to enhance innovation capacity.” The development partners committed themselves to bring the benefits of technology to the LDCs, improve connectivity and reduce the “digital divide.”

Access to knowledge is a basic human right that cannot be denied or smothered. It must be allowed to blossom in an environment of peace, progress, understanding and respect for diversity. Information and communication technologies must not remain within the confines of a few countries, but reach all, particularly the most vulnerable segments of humanity, those who live in the Least Developed, the Landlocked and the Small Islands.

While inroads have been made in some areas of technology in certain LDCs, in these past three years the flame of technology that was supposed to burn bright has dimmed. LDCs are facing the danger of increased marginalization as access to global networks, new information technologies and connectivity has widened the digital divide. The urgent and immediate question that needs to be asked: **how can technology bring about a change in the lives of the poor?**

Mr. Chairman:

It is in this context that special attention is needed for Africa where 34 out of 50 LDCs are located. A few years back, for most Africans, there was 1 public telephone for 17,000 people. Most calls between African countries are still routed through Europe or the US. This costs African countries some \$400 million a year in transit fees. There were fewer than 3 computers per 1,000 people and only 1 person in 1,500 had access to the Internet.

But today, Africa’s economic performance is raising hope for a possible turnaround. While the economies are still fragile and the gap between the information-rich and information-poor nations may appear wide, the growth of mobile cellular and

wireless technology has helped Africa and its LDCs enter the Information Age. The task for all of us is how to direct our newly-gained technological energies towards development. I believe that this can be achieved in three ways: political will and leadership, education and capacity-development and dissemination of information and knowledge.

**How can development partners assist in a tangible way?** Most importantly, by sharing technology, both hardware and software, with the Least Developed Countries. These countries should be supported with resources and technology to reach the targets agreed in the Brussels Programme for (a) increasing computer literacy among students in higher institutions and universities by 50 per cent and in junior and high schools by 25 per cent by 2015, and (b) increasing average telephone density to 5 main lines per 100 inhabitants and Internet connections to 10 users per 100 inhabitants by the year 2010. The digital solidarity fund proposed by President Wade of Senegal last year at the World Summit deserves our full support to be made operational, particularly for the benefit of the most vulnerable countries. At the same time it is vital for training and job growth to support the infrastructure. Again, the power of technology can be harnessed for providing new applications for the benefit of the vulnerable countries: development in agriculture, growth in small businesses, use of computers for security and combating terrorism and towards effective governance.

In December last year, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his opening remarks to the World Summit on the Information Society, pointed out that it was perhaps the first global Summit to be built around an opportunity rather than a problem. Indeed, the opportunity to harness the gains of technology is available to all. Today, as never before, countries in Africa and Asia can, through the medium of the Internet, transcend borders and barriers to showcase their achievements. For the LDCs, it is vital to get involved in the global process of change and transformation by implementing their national plans, mapping out the road to progress and setting up signposts of success.

While the United Nations Office of the High Representative continues to exert its efforts in its advocacy and outreach activities for the vulnerable countries, through both conventional and electronic methods of communications, technology will not have its desired impact in the future if the basic needs of the poor and the disadvantaged are not met.

Today I urge the technologically advanced countries to engage their resources and creative energies in assisting the Least Developed Countries build their technology infrastructure and expertise. We have an unprecedented opportunity to recognize the power of technology and harness it for development in a way that will be inclusive of the most vulnerable segments of humanity and assist them in pulling themselves out of the morass of poverty.

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