

## FORUM

already enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), but some countries were resistant to the inclusion of this language. Now these rights are fully recognized as inherent to the Information Society in every country, and more likely to be respected if global public opinion can be mobilized to monitor and support them. The need for the Declaration to be agreed to by the conclusion of the Summit gave special urgency to obtaining agreement.

Fourth, the Summit established a timetable for action. Unfortunately, many of the explicit development milestones and deadlines of the earlier versions of the Plan of Action did not survive the compromises of the final drafting sessions. However, some key targets remain: national e-strategies in every country by 2005; proposals for a global Internet governance system by the same year; and a list of goals to be accomplished by 2015, including universal access to TV and radio and the connection of all local and central government departments to the Internet.

Ultimately, words will not be enough. The real criterion of WSIS success will hinge on the extent to which these commitments of country leaders translate into beneficial change. This is where the global Information Society itself can help—by giving full vent to the objectives of WSIS and monitoring progress.

WSIS truly needs to stay on-line. The Pentium-vs.-penicillin debate is not resolved in the minds of most leaders, and practice needs to prevail over the hype generated by the diminished technology boom.

Otherwise, it will remain the Summit which was not-as-bad-as-we-thought, but not-as-good-as-we-hoped. ■

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## WSIS—A Global Development Challenge

by *Hamadoun I. Touré*

The two overarching objectives established at the very beginning of the World Summit on the Information Society preparatory process were firstly, to have all major stakeholders reach a shared vision of the Information Society, and secondly, to identify actions that would enable implementation of this shared vision. With the unanimous endorsement of the WSIS Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action by the world's political leaders, both objectives were met.

Moreover, this vision is in particular congruence with the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) general objectives and, in particular, the goals of the Development Bureau. Thus, in my capacity as Director of the Bureau for Telecommunications Development (BDT) of the ITU, I am extremely pleased with the results of the first phase of the Summit, held in Geneva, December 10–12, 2003.

For the ITU to have organized such a major event with more than 11,000 participants from government, industry, international organizations, and civil society—including more than 50 heads of state and vice presidents, some 1,000 media representatives, and more than 300 Summit-related events—is in itself an achievement of which we, the ITU membership, could be proud of. However, the smooth and efficient running of this huge event in itself would have been meaningless had the Summit been unable to reach the results and objectives it had set out to achieve.

I am particularly pleased—from an ITU standpoint—that the outcomes of the Geneva phase of the Summit reflect congruence of vision, similarity of purposes, and significant synergies between the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, and ITU basic texts, particularly the ITU-D Istanbul Action Plan.

Indeed, in its articulation of a shared vision of the Information Society, the WSIS Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action list 11 principles key to building an inclusive Information Society. No less than 8 of these key principles are directly related to the ITU mandate. That is why the ITU, in partnership with other WSIS stakeholders, will actively carry out the decisions and recommendations of the World

Summit on the Information Society, primarily through implementation of the Istanbul Action Plan.

The Summit has been particularly successful in increasing the international recognition of the importance of information and communication technologies in the area of development. The Summit has provided a global, inclusive platform for all participants to harness the potential of ICT and to achieve the development goals of the UN Millennium Declaration.

The Summit witnessed the emergence of new stakeholders in the area of ICT. A number of these stakeholders are actively engaged in promoting ICT for development and are poised to benefit from the successful outcome of the Geneva phase. This is a development we at ITU welcome. International cooperation among all stakeholders represents, in my view, the key ingredient to implementing the WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action, and to transforming the digital divide into digital opportunities.

As we embark on preparations for the Tunis phase of the Summit, the international community's number one priority should be to maintain the momentum, goodwill, and widespread international consensus generated during the first phase of the Summit. Despite the fact that the Geneva phase remained largely silent on how the outcomes of the first phase would be implemented, what the expected results of the Tunis phase would be, and how preparations would be carried out for this second phase, all stakeholders need to commit to a proactive role in the implementation of the Geneva phase results and to the substantive preparations for the Tunis phase.

The success of the Geneva phase of the Summit, the momentum created by the Summit among all relevant stakeholders of the Information Society, and indeed, the focus provided by the Summit to the development component of the Information Society, have all contributed to placing the development of ICT at the forefront of the global development agenda. The ITU looks forward to associating itself with all players in the ICT field, in order that we may fulfill our common desire and commitment to build a people-centered, inclusive, development-oriented Information Society. ■

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## Welcome to the Aircraft Hangar of Babel

*Jamie Cowling*

Experienced conference junkies will tell you there are four ways to gauge the importance of a meeting. First, the quality of the speakers and delegates. Conferences are subject to network effects: the better the speakers, the more delegates; the more delegates, the better the chance of someone you know ringing you up and asking if you will be there. Any more than three of these calls and attendance becomes obligatory. Second, location, location, location. The professional delegate understands that if you are going to spend between three hours and three days in one place, an interesting environment from which to gaze through the window during the fifteenth plenary speech is vital to maintaining sanity. Third, the possibility of policy change; this is, after all, why we do it. Finally, and most important of all, the quality of the goody bag. Like a children's party, the guests ultimately judge the quality of the event by the gifts they receive.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), according to the UN, aimed to bring together heads of state, leading business executives, NGOs, and members of civil society to develop a better understanding of the revolution brought about by information and communications technologies (ICTs) and their impact on the international community. The first phase in Geneva adopted a Declaration of Principles and developed a Plan of Action to be reviewed at the second stage Summit in Tunis in 2005.

So, did WSIS live up to these grand ambitions? The chosen location was certainly an interesting one. Geneva has a reputation as a pretty town by a lake. This is partly true. Geneva Old Town is extremely pretty with narrow cobbled streets and a wide range of chocolate shops and bars selling *vin chaud* to warm weary delegates. WSIS wasn't in the Old Town. The Summit was held in a cavernous, windowless hall by the airport in an area that makes Swindon seem like a World Heritage site. Attending WSIS recalled McLuhan's vision: the world village in an aircraft hangar—the aircraft hangar of Babel.

There was a photo opportunity of world leaders. Well, not exactly world leaders. The developing nations sent heads of state, the United Kingdom sent