Speech of

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Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Egypt

Opening Ceremony

First Internet Governance Forum

IGF Athens 2006

30th of October – 2nd of November 2006

Divani Apollon - Athens, Greece

Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of the ITU,

Mr. Michalis Liapis, Minister of Transport and Communications of Greece,

Mr. Nitin Desai, Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General for Internet Governance,

Mme. Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Information Society and Media at the European Commission,

And colleagues,

Mr. Vint Cerf, a real godfather of the Internet pioneering community,

Mr. Guy Sebban, ICC,

Mme. Natasha Primo,

Mr. Bob Kahn,

Honorable Audience,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure and honor to be with you today addressing your distinguished gathering at this remarkable event, marking the beginning of a new process for Internet Governance dialogue, "The First Internet Governance Forum". First, I would like, on behalf of the Egyptian government, to extend special thanks to the government of Greece headed by H.E. Mr. Konstantinos Karamanlis, Prime Minister of Greece, for hosting this important forum and to all the parties that have contributed to its successful organization, especially the IGF Advisory Group, its chairman Mr. Nitin Desai, and its Secretariat headed by our friend, Amb. Markus Kummer.

Allow me to seize the chance to express our sincere appreciation for the tremendous efforts of Mr. Kofi Annan, the U.N. Secretary-General, who spared no efforts to support the process of Internet Governance since the first phase of the WSIS led by the ITU in Geneva and until the convening of the IGF here in Athens. Let me also extend our warm congratulations to Mr. Ban Ki-Moon wishing him the best in his vital mission to build bridges and close divides.

Here we convene at the first IGF meeting after a long process that involved sincere efforts of all stakeholders from both developing and developed countries. Today, the global Internet community is clearly reassured that this newly born forum comes to respond to, and materialize the need for a stronger international dialogue and participation and more collaborative cooperation on Internet Governance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The indisputable imprint of the Internet on our lives should always remind us of the long journey that the early Internet community has passed through to reach this point. It is with no doubt that this Internet has developed to what it is today in a bottom-up approach, where its evolution is historically attributed to technical and research pioneers such as Mr. Vint Cerf and Mr. Bob Kahn. I have personally witnessed and benefited as a professional among many others from a strong collaboration among the professional community and the industry as well as the support of organizations such as ISOC, which successfully promoted the Internet and helped it to spread freely worldwide in a way that is truly materializing the concept of "Internet for All".

Despite its young age, the Internet has turned into a robust mechanism transforming all walks of our lives; the way we learn, work, communicate and do business. Its impact is not confined upon individuals only but it is extended to be a key factor in the world economy as well. Internet is, all the more, presenting itself as a pre-requisite for the global Information Society, to an extent that it has become one of the main pillars of the socio-economic development at large.

With this increasing reliance on the Internet as a revolutionary resource for growth and development of humanity, it became more and more a necessity to ensure the stability, sustainability, and security of this global medium through more international cooperation and coordination. This has led to the emergence of the Internet Governance theme strongly on the international arena and within the global Internet public policy dialogue.

Internet Governance has been an ever broadening subject with intertwined technical and policy dimensions where it is hard to draw the line. It also implies broader and diversified issues, such as SPAM, Internet Exchange Points, International Interconnection Costs and Multilingualism, as well as Security Frauds, Data Protection, Consumer Protection and Privacy, to name only a few. It is therefore essential for the Internet to be an area of cooperation, inclusion, innovation and integration. It is our mission to make maximum use of the IGF, to fulfill this concept and gain from all opportunities for the benefit of the global Internet community, while allowing the Internet, as promoted by the industry, to continue its growth as a central element of the global Information Society infrastructure.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although the Internet is developing and spreading in an unforeseen pace, yet its uptake in developing societies is still relatively slow and lagging behind, and is thus contributing to a widening ICT gap and increasing digital divide. Let us not forget, ladies and gentlemen, that access is only available to one billion users out of the global world population exceeding six billions. Most developing nations still face the same set of barriers that limit Internet access and penetration in the countries and negatively affect the development of their economies. Those barriers, usually include issues such as high costs of bandwidth, scarcity of local content, unavailability of suitable infrastructures, in addition to lack of human resource development and professional training programs.

Other barriers to Internet penetration which are not confined to developing societies, but also extend to some developed areas; include

the absence of a truly diverse and inclusive multilingual Internet, capable of addressing all user needs irrespective of their language or cultural identity. The language barrier comes as a major hindrance that faces national governments in their endeavors to increase Internet uptake and promote online services.

It is therefore fair to say that increasing Internet outreach and promoting national e-services and e-government initiatives can only be accomplished if people across the world are enabled to access and use the Internet by overcoming all those obstacles. It is imperative for the international community to realize that, unless all those problems are tackled and solved through cooperation among all actors, this powerful instrument will not be able to flourish and expand as desired.

With all this in mind, the IGF advisory group, in which Egypt is glad to be represented, has attempted to comprise an agenda which meets the concerns and expectations of all stakeholders. It has agreed on addressing during this first meeting, the main theme of "Internet Governance for Development", reflecting four broad topics, namely: Openness, Security, Diversity and Access, with Capacity Building as a cross-cutting priority.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Egypt, Internet development has succeeded via a strong public-private partnership and through an intense collaborative community effort that includes private sector, academia and civil society. Many challenges and obstacles are being faced along this process such as low penetration, immature markets, developing infrastructure as well as awareness and funding issues. Yet our experience in Egypt is no different than those of

other emerging markets which are usually confronted by similar challenges in their attempts to develop this critical and significant sector.

Egypt remains firmly committed to its goal of bridging the Digital Divide to ensure that its citizens derive the maximum benefit from information and communication technology. This commitment to fostering a transition to an Information Society is made not as an end in itself but rather as a means towards more fundamental goals of the Egyptian government, such as improved public services, a growing economy, increased productivity and greater opportunities for all.

In a deregulated environment, the ICT sector in Egypt was one of the first sectors to demonstrate a series of successful partnerships between the government, the private sector and the civil society through a number of innovative initiatives falling within its general e-readiness plan and aiming at providing all citizens with easy affordable access to the opportunities offered by new technologies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last month Egypt has hosted the African Preparatory Meeting for the IGF in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa. The meeting has emphasized the fact that Internet communities of the developing world, more than others, need to multiply their efforts and actively participate to the Internet Governance process in order to increase their stake and overcome the existing divide. This can only be achieved if cooperation and participation among all actors is ensured, especially when empowered by the support of the international community through the right human resource development programs.

The process of the African Regional Internet Registry, AfriNIC, is a great example that illustrates the power of multi-stakeholder cooperation in Internet Governance issues, especially for developing regions and emerging markets. Egypt has been actively involved in this process of AfriNIC establishment and is proud to be hosting its mirror site for technical operation, while the main site is in South Africa, the headquarters in Mauritius and the human resource development programs running in Ghana; a truly regional cooperation model. AfriNIC is a success that couldn't have been achieved without the strong collaboration among the various stakeholders: governments, private sector and civil societies of the different African countries; and without the continued support of the international Internet community, especially from the Regional Internet Registries and from the ICANN. Today, Africa can enjoy the results of this fruitful cooperation.

Building upon this collaboration, we have been also actively involved with the global community in supporting initiatives to drive the Internet towards more internationalization. Hosted at one of the private sector data centers in Egypt, we launch a regional resolution server mirroring one of the Internet root servers. We also host the ICANN regional office of the Middle East in our newly established technology park, the Pyramids Smart Village. In this respect, I would like to recognize the effort recently exerted by ICANN and the U.S. government in taking the right steps towards an enhanced autonomy with growing international mandate for ICANN, and thus responding to the international consensus on Internet Governance that arose at the WSIS in Tunis.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past few years, the world has witnessed a paradigm shift in online services and applications. This was articulated by the convergence between fixed and mobile and the convergence between telecom and media, blurring the boundaries between the long-standing separated worlds, thanks to the Internet Protocol that has stimulated the end-user's need for the always-on, high-speed access to information, anywhere and at anytime. It has further created innovative business models together with new sources of revenues and has imposed new regulatory frameworks in order to ensure the stability and sustainability of such a convening world.

Innovation in the Internet world has triggered convergence, not only in technologies and services but also in stakeholders and their dialogues. Accordingly, new synergies and cooperation models have emerged and resulted in cross-fertilization among different actors and parties that did not communicate before. Over the coming few days, many workshops are being organized through collaboration among various stakeholders, in a way that clearly illustrates those new synergies. An example in this endeavor is the workshop on multilingualism that Egypt is organizing in cooperation with the UNESCO and ICANN.

I would like at this opportunity to stress on the importance that the global community should be investing more and more efforts and resources to adopt a global multilingual e-content initiative. I personally believe this should be one of our main priorities during the coming phase in our venture to build a truly diverse and inclusive Internet which can penetrate through new segments and expand to completely new horizons.

We need to illustrate, as a community, further success in this endeavor on e-content as we did before on the access level.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Internet enjoys special characteristics which have made it this unique and indispensable universal medium. While we introduce new features to the Internet and in our attempt to strengthen its outreach, it is vital to ensure that this unique character and irreplaceable structure of the Internet is preserved, maintained and built upon. Security and stability of the Internet should not be affected at any level and the integrity of "One Internet for All" should always be kept ahead of us.

Our expectations from the IGF and for the IGF are endless. It should create a space for deepening dialogue among various stakeholders. It should lead reform built on the development of existing structure and make use of all available resources. The first IGF agenda certainly enhances aspirations of those stakeholders who are also expecting agreement on the future functioning of the forum as well as its substantive priorities and roadmap. A developmental handling of the wider scope of the themes of Internet governance is really vital.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our deliberations today need to be inclined towards the future. How do we foresee the Internet in ten years from now? How can the Internet benefit the coming generations and act as a revolutionary agent for enhancing people's quality of life, especially in least developed areas? How should our societies better utilize the Internet and rely on its innovations to further develop and prosper? Similar questions should

guide our work map for the IGF and should inspire our plans for Internet Governance during the coming phase.

I am certain that this meeting will provide, throughout the coming four days, positive and constructive input from all actors on the issues under discussion. I am also confident that our deliberations and discussions will make this event a successful starting point for the IGF process.

Finally, allow me to conclude by expressing my personal delight to be participating in this historic event, not only because I am confident that it will present an additional milestone in the cooperation among the global Internet community, but also because I find myself sharing this panel with Internet pioneers to whom the development and advancement of the Internet is attributed. I therefore recall the words expressed by U.N. Secretary-General during his speech at the Global Forum on Internet Governance in March 2004 that, "In managing, promoting and protecting the Internet presence in our lives, we need to be no less creative than those who invented it."

Finally, I wish you a fruitful and successful event and look forward to welcoming you all in Egypt for the fourth Internet Governance Forum in 2009.

Thank you very much.