

Speech of the Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Dr. Tarek Kamel, to the General Session of the Second Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
(Tunis, November 16-18, 2005)

Mr. President,
Heads of States, Governments, and Delegations,
Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by expressing the thanks and gratitude of Egypt's leaders, government and people to the United Nations, the International Telecommunications Union, and the Tunisian and Swiss governments for their efforts in organizing both phases of this summit that earnestly contributes to the building of local and international information societies.

We are gathered here today, at the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society - two years after phase one - to show our heightened commitment to its success. The international community is plainly determined to create clear-cut and stable means of maximizing the benefit that can be drawn from the information and communications revolution to achieve the development goals of all societies, industrial or developing, rich or poor, large or small.

The effects of the information and communications technology revolution must not remain limited to realizing economic and development gains, but should rather be expanded to strengthen political, social and cultural ties between nations. It should be employed in building world peace based on justice, equality and a respect of sovereignty within a framework that honors national identity and preserves the diversity of characters, religions, and cultures as the fundamentals of cooperation and integration between civilizations. Doing so would undoubtedly deepen our understanding of the "globalism" of the information society and provide room for all participating nations to develop, manufacture and use information and communications technology as a tool in exercising their right to development.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In light of its regional and international roles, Egypt has diligently and persistently been involved in all preparatory stages of the World Summit on the Information Society. A high-level Arab conference was held in Cairo on May 8 to 10, 2005 to create an aligned Arab, African, and international position with which to tackle its second phase. Egypt has also been actively involved in developing the Arab and African Plans of Action for this phase and updating our regional neighbors on the latest advancements made on regional and international levels since the first summit was held in Geneva.

These efforts have been but a link in a chain of international efforts aiming to coordinate national positions prior to the second phase of the summit, a process that has stressed the elemental importance of regional integration and international

cooperation in driving and developing the information and communications technology renaissance.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society resulted in the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action, documents that address all the active elements of a modern society and lay out the foundations and regulations for the establishment of an information society.

Disagreements that arose during the first phase on financing and internet governance, as well as clarifications expected in this second phase on issues such as following up on the outcomes of the summit ("Beyond Tunis") can be turned into a driving force for this success of this summit and its outcomes.

I would therefore like to seize the opportunity presented by this esteemed assembly to brief you on Egypt's position on some of the most important issues of this phase and the implementation of its outcomes, particularly as the establishment of an information society is a lengthy and demanding process.

First: Internet Governance

I would like to join those who preceded me in thanking the Internet Governance Working Group and to praise the efforts of the Secretary General and his internet governance representative. These efforts were reflected in the working group's report, whose preparation Egypt had the honor of participating in.

Internet governance is as much a point of discussion now as it was before and following the first phase of this summit. This is undoubtedly due to the realization that the internet is no longer a mere means of exchanging information or an e-content depot, but rather has evolved as a technological connection for communications and media, forming a means of development that affects all aspects of life and playing a fundamental role in the formation of a prosperous information society. This has created a need to revise internet governance tools, and, most importantly, increase international participation in the framework of multi-party partnerships between the private sector, civil society, and governments.

On the technological and administrative levels, Egypt promotes the importance of stabilizing operations of basic internet resources, including domain names, internet provider addresses, and root server systems, while maximizing the benefit gained from technological and economic expertise.

Egypt supports the continued role of international organizations in such efforts and encourages the establishment of a new forum (or forums) on issues as diverse as internet crime and multilingualism. Such issues have an immediate effect on internet growth and thus deserve more attention from the involved international circles.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Egypt's position on internet governance stems from the realization that the debate has become a vicious circle. The debate must include all parties from both developing and developed nations and ensure inter-government cooperation on policy setting and private sector investments for the development and upgrading of civil society networks. We must make available the modern tools required to maximize the benefit of this global network in support of global economic and social development issues.

Second: Financing

I am sure you agree that this issue has great repercussions on the information society planning process. In seeking new means of financing, Egypt has suggested the "debt-swap" as a means of paying off the outstanding debts owed by many developing countries while financing projects and programs outlined in the Plan of Action. A debt-swap converts debts into development projects that benefit both creditor and debtor. Egypt has started working on debt-swaps as they have proved their feasibility in sectors other than information and communications technology. Egypt has already created a fund for the development of information and communications technology that will provide the necessary financing for debt-swaps.

Third: Follow-up "Beyond Tunis"

The importance of this issue arises from the necessity of implementing the outcomes of this summit, a process that cannot be undertaken only in part. Egypt welcomes the ongoing international dialogue and suggestions made by governments and different international authorities that aim to create practical tools for follow-up.

As a preliminary basis for negotiations, Egypt welcomes the suggestion to establish an executive arm based on the open working groups in accordance with the Plan of Action. Such a measure will necessitate the appointment of an appropriate international coordinator, and in this context, Egypt welcomes a discussion of the various suggestions to delegate UN bodies in charge of follow-up to play this role.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We hold our summit today in the city of Tunis overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, which has witnessed the interaction of many civilizations and cultures over the years.

On this occasion, the Mediterranean has an opportunity to become the world's first "electronic sea", upon whose waves bridges of cooperation on information and communications technology can be built between north and south. Egypt is prepared to support this cooperation, and this will be made clear in our future activities that will work towards enhancing north-south and south-south cooperation.

In this context, we suggest establishing a high-level Euro-Mediterranean forum to bolster the role of information and communications technology in regional economic and social development and prepare Egypt to play an organizational role at the beginning of 2006.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Egypt had a strong presence in the first phase of the summit in December 2003, when President Hosni Mubarak announced the Egyptian Information Society Initiative. Allow me to assure you that since that time Egypt has successfully implemented a number of leading national initiatives that other countries can also benefit from. These include the technology nurseries initiative for small and medium enterprises, enabling women in the information and communications technology sector, smart schools, e-government, and cultural heritage documentation. The Smart Village was constructed to serve as the basis for a technological society in Egypt and the region with the aim of exporting services and expertise.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The establishment of an information society requires us to abide by a number of policies and directives, the most important of which is the deregulation of services and the restructuring of the information and communications sector while promulgating the necessary legislation. The implementation of these policies in Egypt has so far led to a surge in new communications services by more than 20% per annum, and yet there still remains ahead of us a need to enhance the role of civil society organizations in protecting consumers and increasing technology awareness while restructuring and organizing the sector.

I would like to stress that investing in research and development tools is the basis for innovation, creation and maximizing the value added to society. In this context, it is our pleasure to present the results of our experiences in partnering with international companies to develop skills and invest in resources and value added products for regional benefit.

I'm sure you share with me the opinion that the development of an information society and the generation of knowledge, within the framework of comprehensive human resource development, require effort in the application of policies that aim to eradicate e-illiteracy and raise citizens' basic information technology skills..

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the second and final phase of the World Summit on the Information Society is about to commence, its end will only represent to Egypt the beginning of a new phase in the building of an information society and a great opportunity to build more bridges of cooperation with different nations of the world. Egypt will continue with its national, regional, and global efforts to follow up on the application of the agreements made at both phases of the summit. The Egyptian government will continue working towards building a national information society and connecting it to the international information society via cooperation between all parties involved, locally, regionally, and internationally.

I wish you all the best of luck and success, and would once again like to thank the organizers of the summit.

Thank you.