

**ACC statement to the Economic and Social Council  
on information and communication technologies (ICT) and development**

1. The Executive Heads of the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system reaffirm their statement of 11 April 1997 on “Universal Access to Basic Communications and Information Services”. As the United Nations system enters a new century, our overarching challenge is to tap more effectively the benefits of globalization for all people in all countries. Information and communication technologies play a key role in our efforts to meet that challenge. The Executive Heads recognize information and communication technologies as a critical development tool in advancing the globally agreed development goals emanating from the United Nations conferences of the 1990’s and commit themselves collectively to reinvigorate collaborative action to harness the great power of new technology to promote development. The Executive Heads recognize the right of universal access to information and communication technologies, and knowledge as a global public good.
2. Access and connectivity to information and communication technologies are critical to the integration of developing and transition economy countries in the global knowledge society; enhancing efficiency and growth in key sectors of their economy; and supporting the social, economic and cultural goals of their societies. Information and communication technologies have wide ranging applications cutting across sectoral boundaries in agricultural productivity; population, health and education; generation of employment; transportation; industry, trade and finance; empowerment of people and governance; environment; prevention and management of disasters; and information and knowledge sharing. In the development process, information and communication technologies are strategic factors and need to be systematically integrated in the development plans as well as programme priorities.
3. The present global outlook, though it has many encouraging aspects, represents a challenge for the United Nations system. While the total number of people with access to information and communication technologies is expanding rapidly, the *Digital Divide* is real and represents a gross imbalance in the access to or use of information and communication technologies in different parts of the world. While a lack of resources is a major constraint, the problem has many facets. The spread of information and communication technologies and their universal usage require basic infrastructure and human resource development to support them. There are also serious concerns about security and privacy, about abuse for criminal purposes, about cultural identity, about loss of revenues to e-commerce, as well as about language and gender barriers. Though the technological gap may to some extent be leapfrogged without going through the traditional stages of development, access to such solutions presupposes an existing degree of wealth, or human resource development, that many developing countries and many people in developed countries do not have.

4. The Executive Heads recognize that there are a number of developing countries that have made considerable advances in ensuring access and connectivity by their citizens and enterprises to the global knowledge network. Often, the most effective policies appear to include an appropriate mix of market liberalization, private sector participation and independent regulation. Efforts should be made to facilitate the flow of information and the sharing of experiences and best practices among developing countries, particularly in the context of South-South cooperation.
5. Developing countries should be further assisted in building up their infrastructure and developing the capabilities of their citizens, of public service institutions and enterprises in gaining access to and in managing information, as well as in applying both global and local knowledge to development. Harnessing local knowledge and perspectives, particularly those of marginalized groups as well as women, youth, and indigenous communities, is important for development but also for ensuring that the content of cyberspace reflects also the world's cultural and linguistic diversity.
6. The ACC is conscious of the need for further urgent, targeted, and coordinated action from the United Nations system to support efforts to ensure access and connectivity to the global knowledge network for all and thus ensure the further beneficial integration of the economies of developing countries into the global economy and information society. Such action should be embarked upon in partnership with all the stakeholders. In particular, our partnerships with the private sector must be consolidated and expanded. The system itself, must keep current its knowledge of available information technologies and telecommunications systems and integrate these in its own operations and programmes to build its knowledge acquisition, adaptation, and dissemination and rapid response capacity.
7. In this regard, the Executive Heads welcome the forthcoming consideration by ECOSOC of the theme on "Development and international cooperation in the XXIst century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy". The outcome of the Council's deliberations will further advance recognition of the importance of information and communication technologies and contribute to policy coherence, complementarity and coordination, as well as to mobilization of resources in order to bridge the knowledge gap and optimize the benefits of globalization for the majority of the world's population, in particular the poor.
8. The ACC recognizes that while many initiatives have been taken in the United Nations system to promote and use information and communication technologies as an instrument of development there is clearly need for more complementary and synergistic efforts in the use of information and communication technologies in support of the developing countries and in the operations of the United Nations system.
9. The Executive Heads agree that the following issues need to be pursued:

- Strengthen collaboration among organizations of the system, including at the country level, in computerization, networking, information management and software application and content development as well as in supporting country strategies for Internet development and ICT support;
  - Organize a system-wide community of ICT experts and users through innovative networking and learning arrangements, as a system-wide resource facility and consultancy service for information on options, costs, good practices, and emerging developments; for use by organizations of the system for their knowledge management and ICT needs and for operational activities for development;
  - Promote capacity building and innovative use of ICT as special opportunity to overcome the development barriers of isolated and distant communities, such as the SIDS Network;
  - Carry out studies and policy consultations on the broader developmental, social and cultural impacts of ICT with a view to a promoting of the development and exploitation of appropriate content and of ethical and legal frameworks to ensure universal access while protecting basic human rights, and provide advice to Member States;
  - Develop strong partnerships with the private sector both for internal systems and development activities including along the lines of initiatives outlined in the Millennium Report and those already taken, such as the Global Knowledge Partnership, the health network and the disaster relief network;
  - Develop an inventory of systems being used and evolved, particularly for headquarters - field communications, so that possibility of synergy could be further pursued.
10. The ACC has requested its relevant subsidiary bodies to follow up at the inter-agency level on the above issues, building on the Statement on Universal Access to basic Communication and Information Services which it had adopted in 1997. In this context, organizations are invited to cooperate in preparations for the ITU-proposed World Summit on the Information Society supported by ACC at its first regular session of 1999.
11. The Executive Heads commit themselves to work, individually and collectively, towards making the goal of universal access to information and communication technologies a reality.