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BRIEF

WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY, GENEVA (DECEMBER 2003),
- TUNIS (NOVEMBER 2005)

Item proposed by the Republics of Tunisia and Mali
In 2001, the International Telecommunication Union ITU decided to organize a two-phased World Summit, with the first one slated from 10 to 12 December 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland, and the second in Tunis, Tunisia, from November 16 to 18, 2005.

The General Assembly of the United Nations in its Resolution 56/183 endorsed the Summit framework adopted by the ITU Council, and recommended that an open-ended inter-governmental preparatory committee be charged to prepare the agenda, determine the modalities for the participation of other parties, and finalize the proposed Declaration and Plan of Action.

Pursuant to the above Resolution, the UN General Assembly solicited inputs from all the relevant UN agencies, particularly the Task Force on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). It also called on the inter-governmental organizations, international and regional institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations, the civil society and the private sector operators to be actively involved in the inter-governmental preparatory process for the Summit, and indeed participate in the Summit.

The Issue

The world information society is evolving at a breathtaking speed. The rapid convergence between telecommunications, radio broadcasting, multimedia and the ICT has generated new products and services, as well as new methods in economic and commercial life.

Concurrently, commercial, social and professional prospects are decreasing while new markets are open to competition, foreign investments and capital. The modern world is undergoing a real metamorphosis, at a time when the industrial society of the 20th Century is rapidly giving way to the information age of the 21st Century.

This dynamic process heralds radical transformation in all spheres of life: dissemination of knowledge, behavioural patterns, media, education, public health, leisure and entertainment.
For the new process to sustain this momentum and benefit the entire international community, it is necessary to create platforms for the purpose of debating and harmonizing, where necessary, the various positions at the global level.

**African Regional Conference in Bamako**

The preparatory meeting for the Africa Region was held in Bamako, Mali, from 26 to 30 May 2002. Nearly 2000 participants from 51 African countries met in Bamako, Mali, from 25 to 30 May in preparation for the World Summit on Information Society scheduled to take place in Geneva in December 2003, to be followed by another meeting in Tunis in 2005.

The aim of the Regional Conference was to identify all the problems, opportunities, experiences and needs and adopt common positions to be defended. This is the first such major event in Africa, a continent which this time around has taken the initiative to define the orientations needed to reduce the digital imbalance of which it is the major victim.

The idea is about developing global African vision of the information society, to harmonize views on the basic principles underpinning the operational regulations and mechanisms, and to adopt a holistic approach in identifying the needs of societies and thereby put the ICT potential at the service of developmental priorities.

The Final Declaration of Bamako has thus paved the way for Africa’s effective participation in the information society, and taken on board the concerns of the civil society and the private sector.

**Future Prospects**

The Bamako Regional Conference of 2002 has provided an opportunity to articulate a common African position around the benefits that the Continent can derive from the world society of information, as well as the contribution it can make, while preserving the integrity of its cultural values and heritage.

The World Summit on the Information Society will therefore afford the major decision-maker an exceptional opportunity to come together to brainstorm on this revolution and its impact on the international community. The Summit should bring together Heads of State, Heads of UN specialized agencies, representatives from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, the media and the civil society. The roles played by the various partners (Member States, UN specialized institutions, private sector and the civil society) in
coordinating efforts towards the establishment of the information society will be at the center of the preoccupations of the Summit and its preparation.

**Expected Results**

1. The establishment of the Information Society is at the core of the political, economic, cultural and social challenges confronting Africa at the dawn of the 21st Century. The Summit is not about technical achievement, but rather about the mergence of a global society in which human development is partly dependent on the ability to communicate and share information.

2. The World Summit on Information Society should lead to the elaboration of a clear political declaration of intent and a concrete Plan of Action that will enable the Information Society to achieve its objectives, taking due account of all the interest at stake. The scope and nature of this ambitious endeavour call for a strategic partnership between the public and private sector operators.

3. To succeed, the Summit must get the full involvement of the countries of the South. Women should also play an important role in the preparatory work. For, not only do they represent a larger segment of the world population, they also constitute the social and economic pillars of any society.

4. The Third Ordinary Executive Council of the Union should therefore:
   - reaffirm its commitment to the Common African Position adopted by the Bamako Regional Conference of 2002;
   - direct the Commission of the African Union to coordinate its activities with the Executive Secretariat of the Summit, and also invite Governments of Member States of the Union to participate actively in the preparatory process of the Summit, and to be represented at the highest level possible at the World Summit on the Information Society.

*Addis Ababa, June 4, 2003*