UNITED NATION ICT TASK FORCE
Ninth meeting of the Task Force
Geneva, Switzerland
1 October 2005

SUMMARY
OF CONCLUSIONS AND DECISIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Ninth Meeting of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force was held on 1 October 2005 in Geneva immediately following the conclusion of the Third Preparatory Committee for the Tunis Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The meeting was hosted by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Members discussed the results of the 13 September 2005 roundtable on "Innovation and Investment: Scaling Science and Technology to Meet the Millennium Development Goals," the outcome of PrepCom3 of the WSIS, the Task Force's contributions to the Tunis Phase of WSIS, and the Global Alliance Proposal in light of developments since the Dublin meeting of the ICT Task Force. The meeting also heard Prof. Ruge, member of the High-level Panel of Advisors, speak on "Affordable Telecom Infrastructure and Rural Access".

The following is a summary of the proceedings and of the conclusions and decisions adopted by the Task Force under the various agenda items.

OPENING OF THE SESSION AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The meeting Chairman, Mr. Art Reilly, Vice-Chair of the ICT Task Force, opened the session and introduced the agenda, which was adopted. He invited the Task Force to begin considering the agenda items.

Mr. Figueres informed the meeting that following his full cooperation in the investigation in Costa Rica, he has been cleared of allegations. He stands ready to contribute to the work of the ICT Task Force and possible future arrangements.

REPORT ON THE 13 SEPTEMBER ROUNDTABLE ON "INNOVATION AND INVESTMENT: SCALING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO MEET THE MDGS"

Mr. S. Khan called the attention of the Task Force to an informal summary of the roundtable on "Innovation and Investment: Scaling Science and Technology (S&T) to Meet the MDGs" that was made available to members. The summary reflected the breadth of the issues covered by the meeting. The two main objectives achieved by the round table were putting ICT and S&T on the agenda of the 2005 World Summit, and re-affirming the multi-stakeholder policy dialogue as a principle. More than 150 participants attended the event including several

Heads of State and Government. Partners, including the Millennium Project, UNFIP and Cisneros Foundation contributed to financing the event. Mr. Khan also pointed out that there was a strong sense that the roundtable should be the first of a series of similar events aimed to bring together the ICT, S&T, academic and development communities. The next one will be a roundtable organized by the Task Force at the WSIS in Tunis in November.

Members applauded participation of Heads of State and Government. Their involvement is likely to have a strong impact on the development agenda due to their increased awareness and understanding of the issues and in their spreading the messages to other policy makers. They called for more opportunities for interactive dialogue on such occasions.

WSIS

Exchange of views on the outcome of the PrepCom3

All participants welcomed a strong and consistent message contained in the draft outcomes of the Tunis phase of WSIS on the necessity to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) in implementation of the WSIS outcomes. Many speakers also highlighted the crucial role that the private sector can play in harnessing the potential of ICT for promoting the broad development agenda of the United Nations and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Several speakers acknowledged the complexity of building partnerships and the difficulties that big public organizations such as the United Nations may encounter when working with the private sector. There was a general agreement that the optimal approach to implementation of WSIS plans is to be more specific about priorities and objectives and focus on concrete and sustainable projects in order to capture the real strengths of the private sector and show concrete results. Many interventions emphasized that the private sector's objectives in engaging in MSPs are not incompatible with those of other partners, including the United Nations system.

Several speakers stressed the need to involve all stakeholders in ICT policy debate and review, including the donor community and experts from the private sector and civil society, and expressed their belief that forums such as the Task Force or the proposed Global Alliance provide a good platform for engaging these actors. It was also suggested that the Task Force (or its successor) should have a role in supporting the implementation of the Plan of Action, in particular in addressing social issues. WSIS was seen as a process to provide intellectual, political and institutional leadership for the concrete application of ICT to development and emphasized the need to maintain momentum after Tunis, suggesting that the proposed Global Alliance could play an indispensable role.

Contribution of the Task Force to the WSIS

Members had before them a document "UN ICT Task Force Exhibition at WSIS 2005." Among the several events being organized jointly with partners, the discussion highlighted the roundtable organized by the Task Force on 17 November from 11:00 – 13.00 entitled "Putting ICT to work for the MDGs." The roundtable is intended to contribute to the WSIS and beyond by building on the dialogue begun at the 13 September roundtable, specifically to build trust

between stakeholders and to improve their ability to work together. The Task Force will also co-organize several parallel events. Task Force and GeSCI will have a shared pavilion in the ICT4All Exhibition. It was proposed that the Task Force Secretariat compile a list of the WSIS activities planned by its members and partners.

GLOBAL ALLIANCE PROPOSAL

Mr. S. Khan provided a brief overview of the vision for the Global Alliance as shaped as a result of extended consultations. The entity is proposed to be linked to the Secretary-General, operating under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. The Alliance is envisioned to be non-operational, but rather as a platform for policy dialogue with a "think tank" role, catalyzing and promoting partnerships and facilitating the exchange of best practices and experience. It should provide an inclusive multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral platform that would serve to contribute to the follow-up and implementation of the Millennium Declaration and WSIS outcomes, linking the two processes. The proposal does not prejudge the outcome of the WSIS, which has yet to define the follow-up modalities.

It was stressed that the Global Alliance proposal is in-line with the overall multi-stakeholder approach that has been advanced throughout the PrepComs and in the draft outcome documents. The proposal enjoyed strong support from developing countries, private sector companies and members of civil society. Mr. S. Khan expressed his hope that, after the WSIS in Tunis, a process to create the Alliance will be formulated quickly in order to not lose momentum and avoid any hiatus in multi-stakeholder engagement, ensuring smooth transition from the ICT Task Force. With this in view, it was proposed to create a start-up group that would work to address questions that remain open and to develop detailed modalities. The ICT Task Force Chairman will hold consultations and make a recommendation to the Secretary-General on how to proceed with the set-up of the group.

In the discussion that followed, members expressed their strong support for the creation of a Global Alliance. There were no expressions of doubt or reservation in this regard, and interventions focused on proposals for optimal realization of the proposal. Several speakers stressed that there should not be any hiatus between the ICT Task Force and the Global Alliance and urged the swift appointment of a start-up group.

It was stressed that the link with the United Nations Secretary-General is crucial in ensuring high-level participation, and the importance of linking the follow-up to the 2005 World Summit with the follow-up to the WSIS. Speakers emphasized a key role that the Global Alliance could play in establishing this link. Several members stated their readiness to provide organizational and material support for the future Alliance by, for example, hosting a regional node (Germany).

Citing the persistent need to raise awareness of the role of ICT for development and the achievement of the MDGs, Mr. Utsumi suggested that mainstreaming the global ICT agenda into the broader United Nations development agenda should be the main objective and primary focus of the proposed Alliance. This approach was supported by many members present. It was suggested that the document "Principles and elements of a Global Alliance for ICT and

Development" would be modified so that this objective appears at the top of the list of intended objectives. Several members proposed that the future entity be called the Global **Forum** for ICT and Development.

Some members noted that the proposal should be clearly differentiated from and complementary to other activities and actors in the ICT4D space. It was stated by many speakers that the new entity should provide intellectual leadership in ICT for development, bringing together leaders, experts, practitioners from various sectors, as well as leading representatives of such important stakeholder groups as youth to identify challenges in focused areas such as health and education, and discuss how to overcome them. Mr. Utsumi agreed that the Alliance could be an effective platform for bringing together governments, the UN system, the private sector and NGOs to work at high, broad policy levels, which is something specialized agencies like UNESCO and ITU have difficulty doing. Operational activities in the field should continue to be executed by the specialized agencies.

Many members made recommendations to further refine the objectives of the proposed Alliance. It was suggested that the Global Alliance play an advocacy role, raise awareness, facilitate policy formulation and, most importantly, provide thought leadership. The Alliance should focus its work on four key areas: political empowerment, economic development, social transformation and cultural enrichment. ICT should be defined to include all forms of communications and not only new technologies such as the Internet. It was also suggested that the Global Alliance should: 1) contribute to the improvement of South-South cooperation; 2) promote the use of ICT as tool to be applied on specific areas such as health, education and governance; and 3) provide a "platform of leadership" that would encourage global action. A caution was expressed against the entity being made too broad a discussion forum. Specificity of themes selected for dialogue could lead to better debate and results. Several speakers noted that the body should be linked to the WSIS process topically but not operationally.

Drawing from the successful example of the ICT Advisory Council in South Africa, a member suggested that the Alliance could have a strong impact on ICT for development issues through a role as a global advisory body. Several speakers thought that one important function of the entity would be as a 'think tank' raising awareness of the importance of concrete projects and analyzing successes and failures. Such work, in the form of studies or recommendations, be made available broadly, not just to the Secretary-General. The 'think tank' function should be linked with action on the ground. In this context, an idea was advanced to explore the feasibility of having virtual interactive capabilities to link with other relevant groups.

On the matter of involvement of the future entity with operational activities, some members believed that the Global Alliance should foster "operational offspring," similar to that of the Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative that was incubated and launched by the ICT Task Force. Several speakers thought that the Alliance should focus on catalyzing action by other actors in the form of projects and programmes, while it should not be an implementing body itself.

Many members praised the effective performance of the Task Force Secretariat and highlighted the value in retaining the Secretariat to service the new entity in order to ensure continuity of institutional memory, experience and quality of support.

AFFORDABLE TELECOM INFRASTRUCTURE AND RURAL ACCESS

The Chair invited Professor Ruge of the Munich University of Technology and Member of the UN ICT Task Force Panel of Advisors to introduce his paper "Affordable Telecom Infrastructure and Rural Access." The study, with substantive contribution by Siemens, is a comprehensive, practical work on providing affordable connectivity, including wireless and wired technologies, especially in rural areas.

Following up to the brief presentation, several members expressed their interest in this work. Mr. Utsumi invited Prof. Ruge to present his paper to the ITU working group on low-cost connectivity. Another speaker highlighted the usefulness of broadband-over-powerline technologies in locations in which electricity infrastructure exists.

DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair proposed that a short two- to three-hour meeting be held at the end of the WSIS on the afternoon of Friday, 18 November, in Tunis. There being no objection, it was so decided. Details will be confirmed by the Secretariat.