



UNITED NATIONS ICT TASK FORCE
Fourth meeting of the Task Force
Geneva
21-22 February 2003

SUMMARY
OF CONCLUSIONS AND DECISIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth meeting of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force was held from 21 to 22 February 2003 in Geneva. The substantive focus of the meeting was on the role of ICT in advancing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and on the Task Force's contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and its preparatory process. The Task Force also reviewed the follow-up to the Third Task Force meeting on Africa and discussed modalities for enhancing its advisory role to the United Nations Secretary-General, in particular, in the context of developing an ICT strategy for the United Nations system.

The plenary meetings of the Task Force were preceded by a meeting of the High-level Panel of Advisers and followed by meetings of four of the Working Groups. A Private Sector Forum was organized on 20 February at the World Economic Forum.

In addition to members of the Task Force, the meeting was attended by a large number of relevant stakeholders, including high-level representatives of the Swiss Government and Governments of several island States of the Pacific region. Representatives of key international institutions, including FAO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, United Nations Volunteers, la Francophonie, regional development banks, World Economic Forum, Global Knowledge Partnership, NEPAD and of prominent organizations and private sector entities, such as, MediaLab Asia, AllAfrica Global Media, McKinsey and Co., Intel Corp., Oracle, BBC and many others attended the meeting. Intensive discussions, both in the framework of the meeting itself and also in the course of side events and Working Groups meetings, served to strengthen existing collaborative ties and to identify new areas of future coherent joint action.

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

Agenda item I: OPENING OF THE SESSION AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

On Friday 21 February and Saturday 22 February (morning) the Task Force had three plenary meetings.

In his opening remarks at the first plenary meeting, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs emphasized the instrumental role that the Task Force could play in achieving the MDGs and in contributing to the WSIS.

The meeting was chaired by the Vice-Chairman of the Task Force. In his introductory statement, he summarized the activities of the Task Force since its last meeting in September 2002 mentioning, in particular, the adoption of the revised Strategic Plan, the first annual report of the Task Force and close cooperation with the Task Force 10 on Science, Technology and Innovation of the United Nations Millennium Project. Also highlighted were contributions by the Working Groups and Regional Nodes of the Task Force to the preparatory process of the WSIS, as was the launch of the Digital Diaspora Network for the Caribbean. The Task Force secretariat had co-sponsored the international conference on facilitating connectivity for older people “Caring Communities for the 21st Century: Imagining the Possible ‘Age of Connectivity’” held in New York on 12 February 2003. The Task Force continued to actively pursue the Policy Awareness and Training Programme for the Ambassadors and diplomats of the United Nations. It had produced a book “ICT for African Development” that contains comprehensive information and analysis on the current ICT developments in Africa and the challenges ahead.

The meeting adopted the provisional agenda as contained in document [UNICTTF/IV/2003/01](#).

The meeting **considered four principal items of the agenda: 1) ICT for advancing the Millennium Development Goals and monitoring progress; 2) The Task Force’s role in the WSIS – dialogue with the WSIS Executive Secretariat and the ITU; 3) Follow-up to the Third meeting discussions on Africa; 4) The Task Force’s Advisory role to the United Nations Secretary-General; and Other matters.**

Agenda item II: ICT FOR ADVANCING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND MONITORING PROGRESS

In his address to the session, Mr. Erkki Liikanen, Member of the European Commission, Commissioner for Enterprise and Information Society, stated that the MDGs provided a useful focal point to bring together all actors involved in ICT and development. They also provided a framework within which the various aspects of their work could be benchmarked. He stressed that the right regulatory framework was crucial for successfully promoting ICT and development. IT investment and reform of the public sector should be undertaken in parallel.

The meeting then heard a series of important presentations on the relationship between ICT and the internationally agreed development goals, primarily the MDGs, and on the contribution that the Task Force could make to the achievement of these goals through promoting the effective and targeted use of ICT for development and also through developing a framework for monitoring and assessing the progress.

A Global eSchools Initiative, a joint proposal of WG3 and WG5 being developed in partnership with Intel and McKinsey, was presented to the meeting. This initiative aimed at connecting local communities, within developing regions, to the Internet by 2015, utilizing region-wide educational/community infrastructure.

In the course of an interactive dialogue that followed the presentations, broad consensus emerged on the following elements:

- **The Task Force should consider how to contribute to linking the MDGs with the outcomes of the Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg conferences;**
- **The Task Force should play an active role in linking the Geneva and Tunis phases of the WSIS, including by promoting ICT applications for advancing MDGs and measuring progress; in this context, it was suggested that the mandate of the Task Force should be extended at least to the end of 2005 to cover the Tunis phase of the WSIS;**
- **The Task Force should continue to closely cooperate with the Millennium Project Task Force 10 on Science and Technology; comments were invited, by 3 March 2003, on the draft document “The Role of ICT in Enhancing the Achievement of MDGs (a Contribution to the Work of Millennium Project Task Force 10 on Science and Technology)”;**
- **Working Groups 3 and 5 will report to the Task Force within a few weeks on the further development of the Global e-Schools Initiative.**

Agenda item III: THE TASK FORCE’S ROLE IN THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY – DIALOGUE WITH THE WSIS EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT AND THE ITU

The Secretary-General of the ITU briefed the meeting on the planned structure of the WSIS highlighting the importance of the side and parallel events, in addition to the plenary sessions, as well as on the importance of broadening the ownership of the process. He invited the Task Force to lead in organizing some side and parallel events.

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs highlighted ways in which the Task Force could contribute to the WSIS. First of all, the Task Force can help generate sufficient interest for Heads of State to participate in the Summit, to make the WSIS a “must-go” event. Second, the Task Force can help explain

why the WSIS is a “cabinet matter” rather than a matter to be dealt exclusively by IT or telecom ministries. In this context, he suggested that a group of Heads of State/Government could be set up to play a “champion” role in promoting the WSIS process and in assuring participation of other Heads of State. Finally, in addition to government leaders, other key stakeholders, such as business entities and NGOs, should be actively involved in the preparatory process as well as in the Summit itself. Task Force members have large networks of contacts, which should be used to mobilize as many stakeholders as possible. NGOs, and not necessarily only those that are active in the ICT area, should be convinced that the Summit was important for their individual agendas and thus brought aboard. That would create a political pressure on national governments to place the WSIS on their list of priorities.

The Director-General of the Swiss Federal Office of Communications discussed the WSIS from the perspective of the host country. He identified two points for success: political relevance of the outcome of the intergovernmental process and the organization of parallel events. Parallel and side events provided a possibility for the private sector and NGOs to showcase their solutions in a politically neutral context. These events provided also an excellent opportunity for Task Force participation. Benchmarks should be developed and best practices defined to measure the outcome of the Summit. One measurable goal could be that by 2008, every village should have a telecenter. He further emphasized that the Summit could only be a success if all key stakeholders were actively involved.

In their subsequent interventions, speakers focused on the ICT Task Force’s input to the WSIS process through its Working Groups and its multi-stakeholder networks, its capability of analyzing and defining issues relevant to the process as well as on suggesting concrete outcomes. Participants also saw **the Task Force as a good instrument for catalyzing the implementation of outcomes and generating process on the ground. The two phases of the WSIS were seen as an opportunity to take stock of progress made. Speakers also noted that the Task Force had a role in identifying and thinking about new policy areas that needed to be looked at in the context of the information society.**

The Working Groups briefed the meeting on their work contributing to the WSIS process. The Regional Commissions of the United Nations highlighted the importance of taking a regional approach to ICT. The Task Force and UNDP presented an outline for a Virtual Symposium (web based platform) for the WSIS which was met with interest.

As a result of the discussion, the members of the Task Force generally agreed on the following elements:

- **The Task Force should perform an advisory function to the WSIS process;**
- **The Task Force should use its network of contacts to promote high-level Summit participation;**
- **The Task Force should play an important role in the follow-up to the WSIS and assist in implementing the plan of action of the Summit;**

- **Regional benchmarks should be developed in the WSIS process, with a focus on regional needs;**
- **The Task Force should use its capacities to link the Summit with the field and help in identifying partners for that process;**
- **The Task Force can assist with setting up country processes linked to the WSIS;**
- **Regional Networks should establish a database with best ICT practices;**
- **The Task Force could lead, at the Summit, a WSIS theme on e-education in collaboration with all concerned agencies;**
- **The Task Force could host a partnership dialogue to showcase concrete activities reflecting ICT Task Force themes (with Head(s) of State);**
- **The Task Force should organize a side event to showcase the importance of ICT for meeting the MDGs;**
- **The Task Force can help strengthen capacities of developing countries to benefit from the WSIS.**

It was also proposed that **a representative of the anti-globalization movement be invited to the next Task Force meeting to share their views on ICT's role in development.**

Agenda item IV: FOLLOW-UP TO THIRD TASK FORCE MEETING ON AFRICA

Members heard a series of presentations on various streams of activities related to ICT for development in Africa to which the Task Force is contributing, in particular the activities of the e-Africa Commission and the private sector activities in support of its work, civil society- related activities in support of ICT-for-development programmes, and the work related to the African diaspora.

In the course of an animated discussion, speakers stressed that **civil society organizations should be more involved in the development and implementation of ICT-for-development initiatives in Africa. It was emphasized that since health was one of the biggest challenges facing Africa, the potential of ICT should be exploited as part of health development. Several speakers mentioned that it was crucial to connect the large number of ICT-for-development initiatives in Africa.**

It was agreed that:

- **The Task Force should support the e-Africa Commission in project formulation and planning as well as with other aspects related to the implementation of the NEPAD's Plan of Action;**
- **The Task Force should support regions in establishing Digital Diaspora Networks, such as the DDN-A and the DDN-C and in connecting these Networks; the Diaspora Networks should be supported to link lessons learned from Africa to other regions of the world;**

- **The Task Force should make focused and concerted efforts in promoting civil society partnership initiatives.**

Agenda item V: TASK FORCE ADVISORY ROLE TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL

A series of presentations illustrated both the achievements realized by the United Nations system in the use of ICT and the potential that remains to be harnessed in order to produce further substantial efficiency gains.

The Vice-Chair of the Task Force briefed the meeting on the recent General Assembly resolution on ICT-for-development (A/57/L.71). The resolution affirmed the need to use ICTs as a strategic tool to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the development programmes and technical cooperation activities of the United Nations system. The resolution also emphasized the need for coordination and synergy between programmes and activities of the United Nations system and the crucial role that ICTs can play in facilitating such coordination. It was proposed **to set up a small group from among members of the Task Force to spearhead preparation of recommendations to be submitted to the Secretary-General. The group would organize its work along the lines outlined in the General Assembly resolution. The group would submit its recommendations to the Task Force no later than at its sixth meeting (February-March 2004).** The meeting concurred with this proposal.

In the course of the discussion, the meeting endorsed the following:

- **The Task Force should do a survey/poll of user communities served by United Nations agencies, NGOs, businesses and governments to determine the highest needs for use of online services;**
- **The Task Force, through its links with the private sector, should host a high-level seminar with senior participants from multi-national corporations and heads of successful network ICT businesses as well as CEB representatives to brainstorm on good business practices, which could be translated into meeting United Nations aims and objectives;**
- **An ICT strategy for the United Nations system must build on partnerships with all stakeholders.**

Members agreed that the discussions on these issues would be actively pursued.

Agenda item VI: OTHER MATTERS

The Chairman of the Task Force proposed that, taking into account the vital role of the World Health Organization in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the **WHO should be co-opted into the membership of the Task Force. This proposal was adopted.**

In the course of the discussion on the **date, venue and structure** of the next meeting of the Task Force, the members of the Task Force agreed that:

- Working Groups should meet at the beginning of the next Task Force meeting;
- At the next Task Force meeting, there should be less presentations but more time for discussions and an interactive dialogue;
- Members should communicate via e-mail to discuss issues in preparation for the Fifth Task Force meeting;
- The panel of advisors will review the work of the Task Force and develop a scorecard/benchmarks to evaluate its achievements.

In the context of defining a theme for the next meeting, a proposal was recalled to designate the theme of “Privatization and liberalization in ICT sectors” as a theme for the Fifth meeting.

It was decided that the next meeting of the Task Force will be held in Geneva in conjunction with WSIS PrepCom 3 (15 – 26 September 2003). The exact dates of the meeting would be decided upon shortly.

The meeting was briefed on the forthcoming Fourth annual Shanghai Forum on City Informatization in the Asia-Pacific Region (CIAPR). The Task Force is a co-sponsor of this important event. Members were invited to attend the Forum (18 – 20 June 2003).