



The President of the Economic and Social Council

Statement of the President of the Economic and Social Council H.E. Dr. Ivan Šimonoviæ, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Croatia at the Meeting of the General Assembly Devoted to Information and Communication Technologies for Development on 17 June 2002

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The need for technology transfer and better access to knowledge is well documented and clear. Although knowledge and technological development are amongst the critical factors of economic growth and sustainable development, there is considerable concentration of knowledge, and the technologies deriving from it, in a limited number of countries. The majority of the world population still lives in poverty and has not yet reaped the full benefits of the information and communication technologies (ICT) revolution.

The issue of ICT is not merely about progress of information technologies. It is about structural changes happening in society as a result of such progress, and most importantly, its impact on people. Regardless of where we live or how we live today, due to the process of globalization we are influenced by the information society. Yet, we are not always able to reap its benefit regionally, nationally and locally. ICT can be everywhere a powerful tool for human resources development, as will be underscored in the theme of the human resources development at ECOSOC's High-Level segment starting next month. The impact of ICT on jobs, health and education, commerce and much more should be beneficial to everyone. ICT is a tremendously powerful tool for helping to advance the development goals of the Millennium Declaration and international conferences and in overcoming disparities in development. This potential must be put to a better use.

The Council has in the recent years accorded the highest priority to bridging the digital divide. In the year 2000, it adopted a major Ministerial Declaration on the role of ICT in development. The Declaration proposed a range of initiatives for fostering digital opportunities. It stressed that information and communication technologies can play an important role in accelerating growth, in promoting sustainable development and eradicating poverty in developing countries and countries with economies in transition and facilitate their effective integration into the global economy. ECOSOC, as a catalyst in bringing together all actors in advancing common goals for poverty eradication and development, has a clear role in integrating ICT into economic, social and environment aspects of development.

The Ministerial Declaration also called on the United Nations system and ECOSOC to play a key role in promoting coherence of all efforts to expand the development impact of ICT. In response to this call, the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force was created by the Secretary-General.

The establishment of the UN ICT Task Force enhanced collaboration within the United Nations system. It gave impetus to a wealth of collaborative efforts of Governments, multilateral institutions, donors, the private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders

to enhance the developmental impact of ICT. From ECOSOC's point of view, the Task Force was a pioneer effort. It was the first time the Council launched such a broad-based endeavour, involving not only the United Nations system but also Governments and the private sector in a sustained pursuit of development goals. We will build on this experience as we take steps to further increase the impact of the Council's work. ECOSOC is committed to helping the international community address the challenge of the digital divide.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year at its coordination segment, the Council further advanced the work started by the Ministerial Declaration. It reviewed the role of the United Nations in promoting access to knowledge and technology, including through partnerships. One major contribution of ECOSOC is to mobilize and coordinate the efforts of the United Nations organizations in continuing to help countries to incorporate ICT and establish ICT specific policies towards advancing national and regional development. To this end, the Council helps agencies, funds and programmes to maintain focus on these goals. It will keep ICT high on its agenda and closely follow the work of the United Nations ICT Task Force.

Also, many international, regional and local organizations and their partners are assisting developing countries to cope with challenges arising from the rapid progress of ICT. While many of these activities are the result of collaborative efforts of multi-stakeholders, it is important that all parties are aware of the work of others so that every effort leads to efficient implementation and best results. In this regard, a coordination role of ECOSOC is essential.

Partnership and collaboration of all stakeholders is increasingly regarded as a critical element for the achievement of development goals. For example, partnership was carried to an unprecedented level at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey. There, ECOSOC was asked to help ensure that international organizations, civil society and private sector “stay engaged” in the follow-up to that conference.

I am confident that the World Summit for Sustainable Development will now bring the sustainability dimension of development to the focus of our international agenda. It will provide a powerful new Platform for launching partnerships efforts to achieve more balanced development, where ICT should be given an important role.

Finally, the World Summit for Information Society in 2003 and 2005 will be a major opportunity to discuss further actions needed to bridge the digital divide and to use the full potential of ICT to reach the Millennium goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Knowledge is a key to development. As we speak, technology, especially ICT, is making rapid progress while leaving the question of disparities in development unresolved. I would like to assure you that ECOSOC is committed to helping the international community to address this challenge. The guiding principle of our efforts should be that development for all presposes knowledge for all and ICT for all, without any discrimination.

I wish this meeting every success.
