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Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Meeting of the General Assembly devoted
to information and communication technologies for development

President Wade, Secretary-General Annan, Distinguished Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my distinct pleasure and honour to preside over this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development. We are living in the age of ever-accelerating globalization. The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) is the major trend driving this process of globalization, which, in turn, is shaping the knowledge-based economy in the 21st century.

The ICT revolution is opening new opportunities for economic growth and social development. ICT can make a tangible difference in the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the globe through their empowerment and thus enable them to take full advantage of the globalized world economy.
New advances in the fields of ICT are further enhancing the already immense potential for dramatically accelerating development through "leapfrogging" stages of technological development.

ICT can contribute to the empowerment of women to reducing gender inequalities, and to the active participation of disabled and elderly persons in socio-economic life and development; it can bridge the distance between rural and urban populations; it can significantly strengthen the global fight against diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, to name just a few of its potential benefits.

However, we are faced by the sad reality that this immense potential of ICT is not currently being adequately harnessed. The digital divide threatens to further marginalize the economies and peoples of the developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition. Moreover, given the very dynamism of the ICT revolution, every day that passes without effective action further widens the divide, making the need for concerted effort by the international community a matter of utmost urgency.

At the United Nations, the urgent necessity to put the potential of ICT at the service of development for all was recognized and reflected in a number of important intergovernmental documents, in particular the Ministerial Declaration of ECOSOC 2000, and subsequently endorsed by the Millennium Summit.

I think we all agree that political leadership and commitment at the highest level are necessary in order to integrate ICT for development programmes into national development strategies, for creating a supportive regulatory and legal environment, and for building an effective matrix of international cooperation.

The full and early realization of the potential of ICT for development at the global level requires more than just coherence and leadership at the national level - it needs a broad international commitment of political leaders to act in concert, on the basis of genuine mutual interest and partnership, in building a global environment in which ICT can be made to work to promote development for all. I would like to stress that, in this, the role of the United Nations is indispensable.

In this regard, I am particularly grateful to His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, for his full commitment to ICT development and his graciousness to be present at this meeting despite of the pressing schedule. President Wade's speech reflecting hisvast experiences and leadership to promote ICT cooperation both regional and global level will enlighten us and set the tone for the meeting in discussing how to enhance the role of the United Nations to put ICT for development.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the ICT-for-development activities - at the national or international levels - we also must bring all relevant stakeholders together. In particular, the effective and sustainable involvement of the private sector is vital. Indeed, the private sector must play a critical role in ICT development efforts and is an essential source of technological innovation that generates economic growth, employment and wealth creation.

The private sector also has the financial and technological wherewithal to make a substantial contribution to ICT for development by forging partnerships with the public sector at both national and international levels.

The United Nations is in a unique position to effectively promote the involvement of the private sector and public-private partnerships to address the digital divide. A major recent practical step aimed at strengthening the United Nations system's role in bridging the digital divide, in particular by promoting involvement of all relevant stakeholders, was the establishment of the United Nations Information and Communications Technologies Task Force.

You will hear from its Chairman shortly. I wish to say only that we strongly believe that the Task Force, working in close cooperation with other multilateral initiatives, will be able to make an important contribution to strengthening the role of the United Nations in promoting ICT for development.

I also welcome the very valuable contribution made by the G-8 DOT Force set up at the Okinawa Summit and the Genoa Plan of Action in raising awareness, linking networks and promoting multi-stakeholder initiatives. We shall also hear from the Chairman of the DOT Force at this

meeting. There has been a great deal of collaboration between these two key initiatives, which is indeed welcome.

Against the background of all the issues that I mentioned and the many initiatives that address these issues, I see the task of this meeting of the General Assembly and its unique value added, in raising the political profile and awareness, mobilizing further support from all the key partners, building on the work of ECOSOC, the UN ICT Task Force and the G-8 DOT Force within an overall, comprehensive approach, and addressing the core issues in a broader context.

The General Assembly is the most universal and representative forum for evolving a meaningful, action-oriented and coordinated response by the international community to the global challenge of ICT in the service of development and thus helping to achieve the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

Our meeting can also make a significant contribution to the preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which is to be convened in 2003 in Switzerland and in 2005 in Tunisia. We look forward to hearing from Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of the ITU, who will brief us on the summit preparations this morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have serious work ahead of us during these two days. We can make a tangible difference in the lives of people all around the globe by making our deliberations realistic and action-oriented. Our discussions should be based on genuine commonality of interests of all stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, who, by combining their efforts, can successfully bridge the digital divide.

Thank you.