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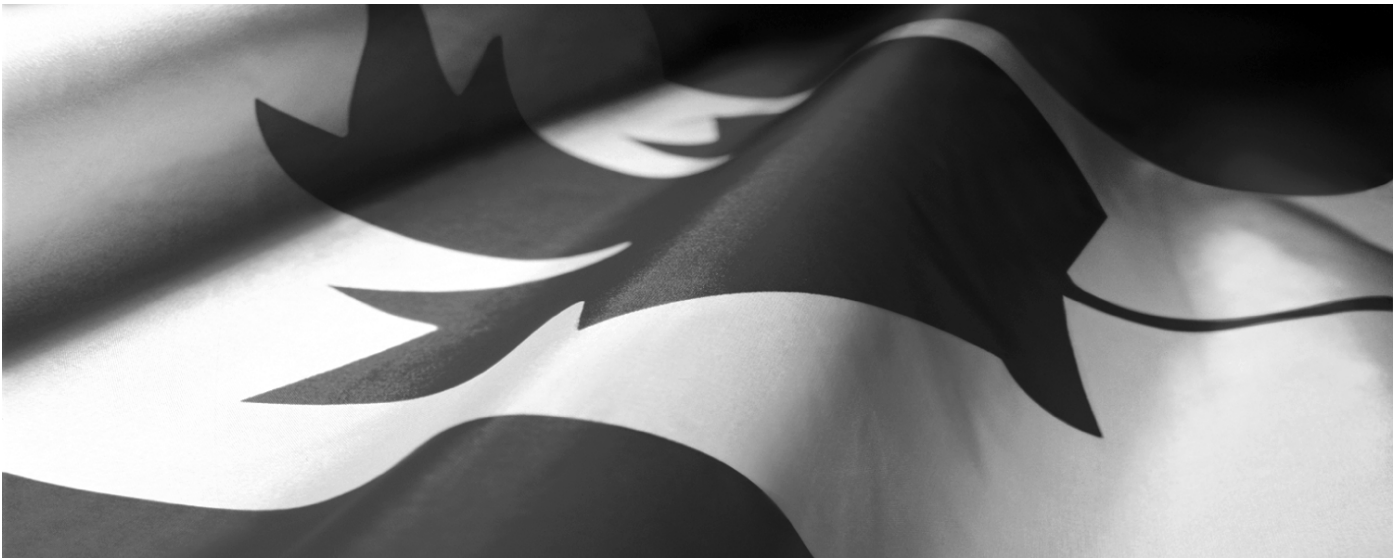of Canada   du Canada

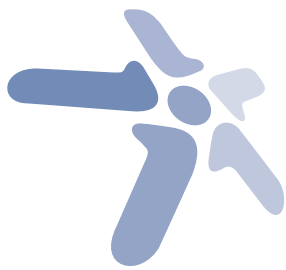# Government of Canada Consultation for the

world summit
on the **information society**
Geneva 2003 — Tunis 2005

Canada

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Contents

WORLD SUMMITS: An Overview

Increasingly, the United Nations (UN), other international and regional organizations, international financial institutions, governments, the private sector and civil society organizations have been coming together at a variety of international events broadly identified as *world summits*. These stakeholders meet with the goal of working collaboratively on global issues and dilemmas. World summits are usually attended by representatives of states that are recognized by the UN as independent, as well as being member states of the UN. There are currently 191 UN member states. As members, these states have the authority to negotiate and vote on international and multilateral agreements.

In addition to the involvement of member states, the participation of citizens in discussions about issues that directly affect them is also important. Indeed, it is people living and working at the local level who are the most directly affected by poverty, development, violence and other issues. Citizens are represented by civil society, which includes various interest groups — ranging from academics and researchers to corporations, women's groups, indigenous peoples' groups, local governments, youth groups, non-governmental organizations and the media. These groups have an increasingly significant impact on and make important contributions to global issues.

Non-governmental stakeholders, often referred to as *observers*, include intergovernmental organizations, specialized agencies and civil society. They participate in summits by sharing their ideas and interests, but they are not eligible to vote or engage in formal negotiations.

The goal of a world summit is to address specific issues, solve a problem, develop a new or common vision, or initiate discussion. This often results in a negotiated political **declaration** and statements signed by heads of state, which include agreed-upon principles relating to a given subject. In addition, an **action plan** with specific goals and time lines can be developed, with the expectation that each country involved will take ownership of and follow up on its commitments. The implementation of the agreed-upon action plan often results in economic and social policy impacts in the countries involved.

The action plan serves as a basis to monitor and follow up on progress achieved by governments, international financial institutions and international organizations. In some instances, an additional meeting may be held a few years after a world summit, to review and monitor the progress made in implementing the action plan.

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The Need for a WORLD SUMMIT on the INFORMATION SOCIETY

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is the first UN summit that does not aim to solve a particular development problem. Rather, it aims to develop a new and common vision of the information society that we want to build. It poses the challenge of establishing appropriate mechanisms and frameworks to support such a forward-looking approach. It presents an opportunity to integrate a human rights approach and a gender perspective into this common vision from the outset. WSIS has adopted an inclusive approach, whereby three institutional sectors of society — governments, civil society and the private sector — will have the opportunity to work together toward a common goal and to develop the mechanisms by which they can collaborate.

Before us lies the challenge of bridging the digital divide. We can achieve this by ensuring that information and communications technologies (ICTs) are the drivers for development and ultimately for creating a truly global information society. This will be done by closing the gap between the information-rich and information-poor countries, as well as the gaps within countries, and by bridging the gender digital divide. In fact, these challenges are viewed as a key means of achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (i.e. eradicate poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote equality between genders; reduce infant mortality; improve maternal health; reverse the spread of disease; ensure environmental sustainability; create global partnerships for development that address aid, trade and debt relief) and of integrating all countries into the global marketplace. Not all countries, nor all people, however, have been able to seize the benefits brought by the information revolution.

The spread of ICTs, including the Internet, is radically changing all aspects of our lives, such as knowledge dissemination, social interaction, economic and business practices, political engagement, the media, education, health, leisure and entertainment. This change is bringing about new products and services, as well as new ways of conducting business and commerce. WSIS is concerned with every aspect of life that, with the influence of ICTs, undergoes profound and permanent changes.

WSIS will bring together all stakeholders (governments, civil society, the private sector and intergovernmental organizations) to participate in producing a shared vision of how to bring about sustainable development through ICTs. It also provides a global platform to address the key challenges faced by all countries in the new information age, such as e-governance and building trust, as well as an opportunity to consider potential applications of ICT to promote objectives such as the promotion and protection of human rights, cultural diversity and gender equality. It will be an opportunity to develop specific solutions and tools and adopt a realistic and viable plan of action. Finally, the Summit could become a catalyst for the revitalization of the ICT and other sectors through the increased demand for ICT infrastructure and applications, and the tripartite partnership between government, business and civil society.

SUMMIT Objectives

The Summit objectives are the following:

1. Develop and foster a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action to build a global information society.

2. Encourage public–private partnerships to implement the plan of action.

3. Organize a large-scale showcasing of ICT applications and services for the benefit of communities, and provide a catalogue of lessons learned.

Timing

The Summit is being held under the patronage of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and will take place in two phases.

Phase I: Geneva 2003

Phase I of WSIS will be hosted by the Government of Switzerland, December 10–12, 2003. It will aim to produce a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action among world leaders, the private sector and non-governmental organizations on an information society. The themes will be broad enough to ensure a comprehensive approach to the issues, but clearly defined to allow for focussed discussion and planning. In addition, a large showcasing of ICT applications and services will be organized.

Phase II: Tunis 2005

Phase II of WSIS will be hosted by the Government of Tunisia, November 16–18, 2005. It will present an opportunity to monitor progress and further build upon the commitments and actions undertaken during Phase I of the process.

Canada's Experience and Success in
BUILDING an INFORMATION SOCIETY

Industry Canada has acted as a catalyst among government departments and the private and non-profit sectors in leading the Connecting Canadians agenda. Given its mandate to promote affordable access to communications services, Industry Canada first established an Information Highway Advisory Council in April 1994 to engage Canadians in a dialogue on what the Government of Canada should do to develop the Information Highway.

The result was public consensus and a political will that catalysed new partnerships between the government, private sector and civil society toward a shared vision on the use of ICTs for development. As the Prime Minister stated in October 1999 in his response to the Speech from the Throne, "a plan for brain gain not brain drain" is needed, based upon the new cornerstones of sustainable development: an information society, a knowledge-based economy and good governance.

Through the Connecting Canadians agenda, Canada has successfully reached its goal of making the information and knowledge infrastructure accessible to all Canadians, thereby making Canada the most connected nation in the world. A key component of the Connecting Canadians agenda was the support of community-based initiatives that responded to people's development needs and set realistic objectives in light of their existing capacity. Hence, capacity building has been a key element.

In the information society, the networking of people and organizations enables them to actively share information and knowledge, accelerating the technical, cultural and managerial innovation processes. Since 1994, the placement of more than 450 000 refurbished computers donated by government and corporations has seeded the introduction of e-learning, and has leveraged the contribution of three to four times that number of new computers. In 1999, Canada became the first country in the world to connect every school and public library to the Internet, including all schools in Aboriginal communities. Industry Canada also developed programs to digitize Canada's cultural heritage and support local content development.

As Canada shifts toward a knowledge-based economy, local entrepreneurship becomes critical to retaining a highly qualified work force. An extensive public network of 8800 Internet community access sites receives more than 34 million visits a year, and many of these sites are becoming local economic development incubators. These e-communities are being mentored by a network of 12 "smart communities," and the resulting industrial clusters are attracting international investment.

Finally, good governance has meant not only providing the leadership and catalysing the partnerships to move Canada forward in an information society and knowledge-based economy, but also becoming an innovative public service and model user. For the past three years, Accenture has ranked Canada first among 23 countries for its leadership in e-government.

Canada is succeeding in managing this process of change through a combination of policies and application programs to build a fair, efficient and competitive marketplace and to stimulate the adoption of innovation processes and products. Canada is now focussing on smart regulation — getting government right. Through our pro-competitive telecommunications policy and universal access fund, and with the introduction of new services, we have attracted private sector investment in infrastructure and market innovation.

To date, Canada is highest in the G8 in terms of the number of households with telephone service, and lowest in business telephone charges. Similarly, Canada's world-leading policy environment for electronic commerce has legalized digital signatures, adopted public key encryption standards for data security, established a tax-neutral policy for transactions over the Internet and implemented new consumer protection legislation on the privacy of information. All of these are building trust in on-line transactions in Canada.

Internationally, Canada has drawn on this experience to assist others, as outlined in the following:

- Industry Canada is working to share internationally the public sector, private sector and civil society experiences associated with the Connecting Canadians policies and programs. This is being done multilaterally, through the UN ICT Task Force and G8 Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT Force); regionally, through the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas and Connectivity Africa; and bilaterally with specific countries.

- Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has a special program area, Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D), which is active in Africa (Acacia), Asia (Pan Asia Networking), the Americas (PAN Americas), and globally (Bellanet). Because of its proven track record in ICT4D in developing countries, IDRC is implementing Canada's two recently created initiatives: the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (**www.icamericas.net**), created through Canada's leadership role at the 2001 Summit of the Americas, and Connectivity Africa (**www.connectivityafrica.org**), announced at the 2002 G8 Summit in Kananaskis as one of Canada's key contributions to support the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

- The Canadian International Development Agency has developed the Strategy on Knowledge for Development Through Information and Communication Technologies and participated in the G8 DOT Force and UN ICT Task Force.

Canada's experience has shown that, in order to be sustainable, government-led policies and programs such as the Connecting Canadians agenda should engage and leverage the resources of key private sector and civil society stakeholders toward a shared vision and new roles.

CANADA'S Vision of a GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY

Canada's vision of the global information society is one that includes all people, women and men, boys and girls. We believe that everyone has the potential to participate in the information society, and that people everywhere should have opportunities to benefit from the possibilities it brings in all areas of human life. These benefits include improved governance, sustainable economic development, strengthened social cohesion, expanded knowledge, individual empowerment and opportunities, and new forms of cultural expression. Hence, community-based development should be a major focus of WSIS. Communities are where most people experience the developmental benefits that can result from using technology to access, create, share and communicate information and knowledge — in work and school, through health care and other public services, and by participating in public life.

In preparing for WSIS, the Government of Canada recognizes that our future depends on deriving these universal benefits from information-related activities that are, or can become, common to people everywhere.

The information society should be a society of shared abundance, since it is based on the most widely distributed elements in the realm of human activity — elements such as intelligence, creativity, self-expression, empathy, understanding, sense of justice and a natural desire to communicate.

However, we are very far from realizing this vision. In today's world,

- there are enormous disparities in people's rights, and in the capacities and opportunities to access, create,

communicate, use and benefit from information and knowledge;

- there are equally enormous disparities in people's access to and capacity to use the ICTs that allow us to perform these activities on a scale and with a speed that has never been possible before.

This digital divide is a multidimensional phenomenon that separates not only developed and developing countries, but also groups of people within countries — whatever their level of development — on the basis of gender, wealth, geographical location, cultural and linguistic heritage, and mental and physical ability.

The progress of ICTs has been so spectacular that it is sometimes possible to become mesmerized by technology, and to believe that it offers a magic solution for all of the world's problems. As we prepare for WSIS, we must always remember that the challenge of building an inclusive global information society is about more than providing universal access to ICTs, although achieving this goal is an essential prerequisite. Fundamentally, our challenge is to create new approaches to poverty alleviation and sustainable development — approaches that harness technological means to development ends, by empowering people and involving them in decisions about how ICTs should be developed, deployed and used.

To create these new approaches, we must be fully aware of the profound changes taking place in the structure of economic, social, cultural and governance activities as the world moves into the information society. We must also carefully analyse what these changes mean for the global development enterprise.

The magnitude of the challenges ahead makes it all the more important to maintain a focus on people — on their development needs, on the human rights and fundamental freedoms all of us should enjoy, and on our obligations and responsibilities to each other. The principles we adopt and the models we design must put people first.

In Canada's view, critical components of building an information society include the following.

National Development Strategies — In the information society, the challenge facing countries is to include e-strategies in their national development plans. E-strategies should be developed in consultation with all relevant stakeholder groups as well as with the general public, and should be linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Such e-strategies would include the establishment of an enabling legal, regulatory and policy framework, including self-regulatory mechanisms. In formulating e-strategies, governments should learn from the experiences of other countries and take advantage of assistance provided by international organizations.

Good Governance — The governance challenge facing all countries in the information society, and particularly developing countries, has two principal dimensions. The first is the promotion and protection of all human rights, including the rights to hold opinions, to freedom of expression and to freedom of association. The second is the establishment of democratic governance institutions and processes, including access to information, that provide opportunities for all individuals and stakeholders to participate in the development and to monitor the implementation of policies, laws and regulations. Of particular interest are the new possibilities for democratic participation that ICTs offer.

Economic Prosperity — All countries face two main economic challenges in the global information society. The first is to use ICTs to increase the productivity and international competitiveness of their current economic activities. The second is to use ICTs to create new products and services that can be offered on local, national and international markets — including those produced by the cultural industries. In addressing these challenges, countries can benefit from the experience of countries that have developed e-commerce strategies.

Education and Public Services — All countries should work toward the goal of using ICTs to improve education and other public services, by making them available to communities and individuals that were previously excluded or not well served (e.g. distance education, tele-health, virtual museums), as well as by using them to improve the efficiency and quality of the services provided to all individuals.

Privacy and Security — For an information society to be trustworthy, infrastructure and services must be reliable, transactions must be secure and private, and personal data must be protected. It is important for countries to adopt policies and measures to protect privacy and security. Equally important is promoting user education and skills related to on-line privacy issues and ensuring that they are tailored to the needs of different participants, considering the differing constraints, institutional contexts, basic assumptions and outlooks of organizations and individual users. Cultural differences need to be addressed in the formulation of strategies for improving international privacy protection. The misuse of ICTs for the purposes of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and trafficking in and violence against women and girls must also be addressed within this context.

Access for All — An information society should be inclusive of all its citizens. In order to ensure accessibility, emphasis must be placed on providing affordable access to the infrastructure, preserving and developing linguistic diversity and cultural identity, and extending the opportunities that ICTs offer to all, regardless of gender, geographic location and social status.

Ensuring accessibility can be accomplished by

- developing national communication infrastructures supported by policies, laws and regulations that promote the development of electronic communication networks, provide universal access to services at affordable prices, and protect intellectual property and individuals' rights to seek, receive and impart information and ideas;

- promoting and preserving both tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage, and sharing cultural knowledge at all levels from local to global; and

- creating content that reflects local cultures or broader communities of interest, which is one of the greatest challenges facing all societies and is a particular challenge for developing countries.

In preparing for WSIS, it is also important to bear in mind that, although governments and international organizations hold many of the keys to unlocking the power of ICTs, it is primarily other stakeholders — individuals, private and public organizations, and communities — that create economic, social and cultural wealth from technology, information and knowledge resources.

Women and ICTs — A focus on the gender dimensions of ICTs is essential to ensure that women are not adversely affected by ICTs, that women and men have equal access to ICTs, and that ICTs are used for women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equality. The full and equal participation of women is integral to building and achieving an inclusive global information society. Gender inequalities can be addressed with the development of gender-sensitive policies, regulations and programs in ICT access and knowledge; gender-sensitive development programs and activities; policies on privacy and security issues of particular concern to women and girls; and the provision of support for non-governmental organizations working to advance gender equality in the context of ICTs.

Canadian **CONSULTATION** on the Summit

Creating and sustaining an information society requires the cooperation and partnership of business, government and civil society. The private sector, through innovation, risk taking and investment, has a key role in developing a country's information and communications infrastructure. Governments, on the other hand, need to provide the supportive policy and regulatory frameworks that allow for market flexibility while ensuring a fair marketplace. Civil society, including the full range of social interests, must be engaged in efforts to facilitate the development of a truly inclusive information society and maximize its potential in social, civic and community enrichment.

Objectives

The Government of Canada is seeking the views of Canadians on how Canada can contribute to a global information society. This kit will help you to understand Canada's position for the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society.

Your participation in Canada's consultations will help shape our presence and contribution at the World Summit on the Information Society. The Government of Canada is seeking to promote initiatives that build on programs and/or projects with international partners either already under way or ready to be launched. Canada's experience and expertise in implementing an information society will be showcased during the Summit via our participation in a number of side events and a compendium of Canadian success stories and best practices to be released at the Summit. Submissions received will be posted on our Web site.

Consultation QUESTIONS

1. Please prioritize the following in terms of where you think Canada can make the greatest contribution in advancing the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action Plan:

   Access for All

   Economic Prosperity

   Education and Health

   Good Governance

   National E-Strategies

   Privacy and Security

   Women and ICTs

   Other — specify:

2. What do you believe are the Government of Canada's best practices in ICTs?

3. The development of an information society is based on partnerships at all levels. In your experience, what has worked best for developing these partnerships? How can the Government of Canada improve its partnerships with intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and civil society at the local, national or international level?

4. Please identify your experiences, initiatives or best practices in using ICTs to promote economic growth and social development at the local, national or international level.

5. How have ICTs contributed to improvements in your community and/or quality of life?

6. How would you or your organization like to be involved in supporting the WSIS process?*

• Obtain up-to-date information on WSIS

• Showcase your ICT initiative

• Organize community meetings on WSIS

• Participate and support the implementation of the Action Plan

• Other — specify:

Visit the Government of Canada's WSIS Web site (**www.wsis-smsi.gc.ca**) and fill out the questionnaire to submit your views on-line. Your input will be automatically captured in a database, where it will be reviewed.

You can also submit your input by one of the following means:

E-mail: **canada@wsis-smsi.gc.ca**

Fax: (613) 998-4530

Mail: WSIS Secretariat
Room 1675 D
300 Slater Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0C8

* The Government of Canada will not provide funding for Canadian organizations to attend the World Summit on the Information Society.