



**WITSA STATEMENT**  
**on the**  
**WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY**  
**DRAFT DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES AND ACTION PLAN**  
**May 2003**

## **Introduction**

The World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA), as a participant in the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI), a coalition of business organizations providing input into the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is pleased to provide these views on the Draft Declaration of Principles and Action Plan.

The WSIS will consist of two meetings – in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunisia in 2005. The UN General Assembly resolution calling for the organization of the WSIS states that it should address the whole range of relevant issues related to the information society. The UN General Assembly has also recommended that the WSIS adopt a Declaration of Principles on the fundamentals of the Information Society in the 21st Century and a Plan of Action for concerted development of the information society.

## **About WITSA**

WITSA is a consortium of 50 information technology (IT) industry associations from economies around the world. WITSA members represent over 90 percent of the world IT market. As the global voice of the IT industry, WITSA is dedicated to:

- advocating policies that advance the industry's growth and development;

- facilitating international trade and investment in IT products and services;
- strengthening WITSA's national industry associations through the sharing of knowledge, experience, and critical information.

## **Discussion**

WITSA concurs that the concept of a Declaration of Principles and Action plan is consistent with the UN General Assembly Resolution calling for the organization of the WSIS. The Resolution further states that the Summit should address the whole range of relevant issues related to the information society. While agreeing that such a Summit needs to encompass the relevant topics, WITSA feels that to attract the high-level representation that the organizers seek, and to translate into effective action, the Summit must have a tightly defined focus. Further, WITSA feels the Principles must be limited, be stated simply and concisely, highlight the private sector role, and recognize the central concept of markets and market forces. The Action Plan should likewise be high-level and targeted.

WITSA believes that governments, in preparation for WSIS, should identify and focus on a set of priority issues that highlight the fundamental building blocks of an information society. Focusing on these priority issues will create a meaningful framework for demonstrable progress toward the long-term sustainability of a truly global information society. These priorities were first articulated in our Statement of November 2002: Building An Information Society: A Roadmap for the World Summit on the Information Society, and are provided below.

- The role of government in providing a favorable regulatory environment to enable the development and deployment of a competitive underlying Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure
- Education, both basic and in the use of information and communication technology products and applications
- Awareness of the potential benefits of applications to improve the lives of citizens, specifically e-government, e-health and e-learning

An underlying secure broadband ICT infrastructure is essential to fully deliver the benefits of the information society. Without such an infrastructure, including access devices, it will be impossible to connect to the Internet from which many of the benefits of the information society come. Thus, the WSIS should focus first on the role of governments in providing a favorable regulatory environment supported by relevant procurement and incentives to encourage such deployment/development by the private sector. Governments, particularly in developing economies, should lead the way by installing appropriate systems within their own structures, giving a boost to local suppliers and enabling higher quality interactions with the communities they serve.

Education is necessary in order to obtain sustainable benefit from the information society. Without the requisite education, including basic tools such as literacy and more targeted tools such as computer literacy, the citizenry will not be able to utilize the deployed infrastructure and equipment necessary to access the Internet. Thus, the WSIS should focus on a framework that will develop the requisite skills through appropriate public-private partnerships to engage in an information society.

Applications are the tools that allow citizens to derive the benefit from the information infrastructure. ICT applications can play an important role in advancing general economic development and living standards. For example, the UNICT Task Force is currently supporting an approach that emphasizes the importance of ICT in development. In fact, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, has stated his intentions to exploit ICT to meet the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, we recognize three primary uses of ICT:

- *e-Learning*: closely linked to the education section above, this recognizes the potential for ICT to advance/enhance education.
- *e-Health*: ICT can greatly enhance health care delivery systems by connecting health care professionals around the world, including online networks of expertise, and access to information about health issues confronting countries.
- *e-Government*: WSIS could also serve as an important forum to address e-Government. Such a focus could ensure that governments better serve their constituencies. Moreover, e-Government initiatives will enhance participation in the information society and enable private sector development in ICT.

The private sector is the primary investor in and innovator of infrastructure, products and services. Effective markets are therefore essential to ensuring a sustainable information society. The priorities set forth above support the creation of markets by fostering a connected, educated and healthy population that can increasingly become engaged in the information society. Such engagement begins through the use of ICT for development and then builds upon itself as development proceeds

## **Recommendation**

The Principles and Action Plan should be re-focused on the key concepts and actions necessary to achieve sustainable development of the information society. The documents should recognize the need for effective government-private sector collaboration. Finally, the theme should focus on open markets, infrastructure development/deployment, education, and applications such as e-Learning, e-Health and e-Government because:

- Without an educated population any deployed infrastructure will be a lost investment;

- An educated population without the infrastructure will not be able to engage in the information society; and
- Without applications so that citizens can experience the benefits of the information society and the resulting societal benefits, there will not be sufficient demand to sustain an information society for the long-term.