

# **Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society**

by the Office of International Information Programs

Information and Communications Technology (IT) is one of the most potent forces in shaping the twenty-first century. Its revolutionary impact affects the way people live, learn and work and the way government interacts with civil society. IT is fast becoming a vital engine of growth for the world economy. It is also enabling many enterprising individuals, firms and communities, in all parts of the globe, to address economic and social challenges with greater efficiency and imagination. Enormous opportunities are there to be seized and shared by us all.

The essence of the IT-driven economic and social transformation is its power to help individuals and societies to use knowledge and ideas. Our vision of an information society is one that better enables people to fulfill their potential and realize their aspirations. To this end we must ensure that IT serves the mutually supportive goals of creating sustainable economic growth, enhancing the public welfare, and fostering social cohesion, and work to fully realize its potential to strengthen democracy, increase transparency and accountability in governance, promote human rights, enhance cultural diversity, and to foster international peace and stability. Meeting these goals and addressing emerging challenges will require effective national and international strategies.

In pursuing these objectives, we renew our commitment to the principle of inclusion: everyone, everywhere should be enabled to participate in and no one should be excluded from the benefits of the global information society. The resilience of this society depends on democratic values that foster human development such as the free flow of information and knowledge, mutual tolerance, and respect for diversity.

We will exercise our leadership in advancing government efforts to foster an appropriate policy and regulatory environment to stimulate competition and innovation, ensure economic and financial stability, advance stakeholder collaboration to optimize global networks, fight abuses that undermine the integrity of the network, bridge the digital divide, invest in people, and promote global access and participation.

Above all, this Charter represents a call to all, in both the public and private sectors to bridge the international information and knowledge divide. A solid framework of IT-related policies and action can change the way in which we interact, while promoting social and economic opportunities worldwide. An effective partnership among stakeholders, including through joint policy co-operation, is also key to the sound development of a truly global information society.

## **Seizing Digital Opportunities**

The potential benefits of IT in spurring competition, promoting enhanced productivity, and creating and sustaining economic growth and jobs hold significant promise. Our task is not only to stimulate and facilitate the transition to an

information society, but also to reap its full economic, social and cultural benefits. To achieve this, it is important to build on the following key foundations:

- Economic and structural reforms to foster an environment of openness, efficiency, competition and innovation, supported by policies focusing on adaptable labor markets, human resource

  - development, and social cohesion;

- Sound macroeconomic management to help businesses and consumers plan confidently for the future and exploit the advantages of new information technologies;

- Development of information networks offering fast, reliable, secure and affordable access through competitive market conditions and through related innovation in network technology, services and applications;

- Development of human resources capable of responding to the demands of the information age through education and lifelong learning and addressing the rising demand for IT professionals in many sectors of our economy;

- Active utilization of IT by the public sector and the promotion of online delivery of services, which are essential to ensure improved accessibility to government by all citizens.

The private sector plays a leading role in the development of information and communications networks in the information society. But it is up to governments to create a predictable, transparent and non-discriminatory policy and regulatory environment necessary for the information society. It is important to avoid undue regulatory interventions that would hinder productive private-sector initiatives in creating an IT-friendly environment. We should ensure that IT-related rules and practices are responsive to revolutionary changes in economic transactions, while taking into account the principles of effective public-private sector partnership, transparency and technological neutrality. The rules must be predictable and inspire business and consumer confidence. In order to maximize the social and economic benefits of the Information Society, we agree on the following key principles and approaches and commend them to others:

- Continue to promote competition in and open markets for the provision of information technology and telecommunications products and services, including non-discriminatory and cost-oriented interconnection for basic telecommunications;

- Protection of intellectual property rights for IT-related technology is vital to promoting IT-related innovations, competition and diffusion of new technology; we welcome the joint work already underway among intellectual property authorities and further encourage our experts to discuss future direction in this area;

- Governments' renewed commitment to using software in full compliance with intellectual property rights protection is also important;

- A number of services, including telecommunications, transportation, and package delivery are critical to the information society and economy and improving their efficiency will maximize benefits; customs and other trade-related procedures are also important to foster an IT-friendly environment;

- Facilitate cross-border e-commerce by promoting further liberalization and improvement in networks and related services and procedures in the context of a

strong World Trade Organization (WTO) framework, continued work on e-commerce in the WTO and other international fora, and application of existing WTO trade disciplines to e-commerce;

- Consistent approaches to taxation of e-commerce based on the conventional principles, including neutrality, equity and simplicity, and other key elements agreed in the work of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);

- Continuing the practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions, pending the review at the next WTO Ministerial Conference;

- Promotion of market-driven standards including, for example, interoperable technical standards;

- Promote consumer trust in the electronic marketplace consistent with OECD guidelines and provide equivalent consumer protection in the online world as in the offline world, including through effective self-regulatory initiatives such as online codes of conduct, trustmarks and other reliability programs, and explore options to alleviate the difficulties faced by consumers in cross-border disputes, including use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms;

- Development of effective and meaningful privacy protection for consumers, as well as protection of privacy in processing personal data, while safeguarding the free flow of information, and;

- Further development and effective functioning of electronic authentication, electronic signature, cryptography, and other means to ensure security and certainty of transactions.

International efforts to develop a global information society must be accompanied by co-ordinated action to foster a crime-free and secure cyberspace. We must ensure that effective measures, as set out in the OECD Guidelines for Security of Information Systems, are put in place to fight cyber-crime. G8 co-operation within the framework of the Lyon Group on Transnational Organized Crime will be enhanced. We will further promote dialogue with industry, building on the success of the recent G8 Paris Conference "A Government/Industry Dialogue on Safety and Confidence in Cyberspace". Urgent security issues such as hacking and viruses also require effective policy responses. We will continue to engage industry and other stakeholders to protect critical information infrastructures.

### **Bridging the Digital Divide**

Bridging the digital divide in and among countries has assumed a critical importance on our respective national agendas. Everyone should be able to enjoy access to information and communications networks. We reaffirm our commitment to the efforts underway to formulate and implement a coherent strategy to address this issue. We also welcome the increasing recognition on the part of industry and civil society of the need to bridge the divide. Mobilizing their expertise and resources is an indispensable element of our response to this challenge. We will continue to pursue an effective partnership between government and civil societies responsive to the rapid

pace of technological and market developments.

A key component of our strategy must be the continued drive toward universal and affordable access. We will continue to:

- Foster market conditions conducive to the provision of affordable communications services;

- Explore other complementary means, including access through publicly available facilities;

- Give priority to improving network access, especially in underserved urban, rural and remote areas;

- Pay particular attention to the needs and constraints of the socially under-privileged, people with disabilities, and older persons and actively pursue measures to facilitate their access and use;

- Encourage further development of "user-friendly", "barrier-free" technologies, including mobile access to the Internet, as well as greater utilization of free and publicly available contents in a way which respects intellectual property rights.

The policies for the advancement of the Information Society must be underpinned by the development of human resources capable of responding to the demands of the information age. We are committed to provide all our citizens with an opportunity to nurture IT literacy and skills through education, lifelong learning and training. We will continue to work toward this ambitious goal by getting schools, classrooms and libraries online and teachers skilled in IT and multimedia resources. Measures aiming to offer support and incentives for small-to-medium-sized enterprises and the self-employed to get online and use the Internet effectively will also be pursued. We will also encourage the use of IT to offer innovative lifelong learning opportunities, particularly to those who otherwise could not access education and training.

### **Promoting Global Participation**

IT represents a tremendous opportunity for emerging and developing economies. Countries that succeed in harnessing its potential can look forward to leapfrogging conventional obstacles of infrastructural development, to meeting more effectively their vital development goals, such as poverty reduction, health, sanitation, and education, and to benefiting from the rapid growth of global e-commerce. Some developing countries have already made significant progress in these areas.

The challenge of bridging the international information and knowledge divide cannot, however, be underestimated. We recognize the priority being given to this by many developing countries. Indeed, those developing countries which fail to keep up with the accelerating pace of IT innovation may not have the opportunity to participate fully in the information society and economy. This is particularly so where the existing gaps in terms of basic economic and social infrastructures, such as electricity, telecommunications and education, deter the diffusion of IT.

In responding to this challenge, we recognize that the diverse conditions and needs of the developing countries should be taken into account. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution. It is critically important for developing countries to take

ownership through the adoption of coherent national strategies to: build an IT-friendly, pro-competitive policy and regulatory environment; exploit IT in pursuit of development goals and social cohesion; develop human resources endowed with IT skills; and encourage community initiatives and indigenous entrepreneurship.

### **The Way Forward**

Efforts to bridge the international divide, as in our societies, crucially depend on effective collaboration among all stakeholders. Bilateral and multilateral assistance will continue to play a significant role in building the framework conditions for IT development. International Financial Institutions (IFIs), including Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), particularly the World Bank, are well placed to contribute in this regard by formulating and implementing programs that foster growth, benefit the poor, as well as expand connectivity, access and training. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and other relevant international fora, also have an important role to play. The private sector remains a central actor driving IT forward in developing countries and can contribute significantly to the international efforts to bridge the digital divide. NGOs, with their unique ability to reach grassroots areas, can usefully contribute to human resource and community development. IT, in short, is global in dimension, and thus requires a global response.

We welcome efforts already underway to bridge the international digital divide through bilateral development aid and by international organizations and private groups. We also welcome contributions from the private sector, such as those of the Global Digital Divide Initiative of the World Economic Forum (WEF), the Global Business Dialogue on E-Commerce (GBDe), and the Global Forum.

As highlighted by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Ministerial Declaration on the role of IT in the context of a knowledge-based global economy, there is a need for greater international dialogue and collaboration to improve the effectiveness of IT-related programs and projects with developing countries, and to bring together the "best practices" and mobilize the resources available from all stakeholders to help close the digital divide. The G8 will seek to promote the creation of a stronger partnership among developed and developing countries, civil society including private firms and NGOs, foundations and academic institutions, and international organizations. We will also work to see that developing countries can, in partnership with other stakeholders, be provided with financial, technical and policy input in order to create a better environment for, and use of, IT.

We agree to establish a Digital Opportunity Taskforce (dot force) with a view to integrating our efforts into a broader international approach. To this end, the dot force will convene as soon as possible to explore how best to secure participation of stakeholders. This high-level Taskforce, in close consultation with other partners and in a manner responsive to the needs of developing countries, will:

--Actively facilitate discussions with developing countries, international

organizations and other stakeholders to promote international co-operation with a view to fostering policy, regulatory and network readiness; improving connectivity, increasing access and lowering cost; building human capacity; and encouraging participation in global e-commerce networks;

- Encourage the G8's own efforts to co-operate on IT-related pilot programs and projects;

- Promote closer policy dialogue among partners and work to raise global public awareness of the challenges and opportunities;

- Examine inputs from the private sector and other interested groups such as the Global Digital Divide Initiative's contributions;

- Report its findings and activities to our personal representatives before our next meeting in Genoa.

In pursuit of these objectives, the dot force will look for ways to take concrete steps on the priorities identified below:

- Fostering policy, regulatory and network readiness -supporting policy advice and local capacity building, to promote a pro-competitive, flexible and socially inclusive policy and regulatory environment; -facilitating the sharing of experience between developing countries and other partners; -encouraging more effective and greater utilization of IT in development efforts encompassing such broad areas as poverty reduction, education, public health, and culture; -promoting good governance, including exploration of new methods of inclusive policy development; -supporting efforts of MDBs and other international organizations to pool intellectual and financial resources in the context of co-operation programs such as InfoDev;

- Improving connectivity, increasing access and lowering cost: -mobilizing resources to improve information and communications infrastructure, with a particular emphasis on a "partnership" approach involving governments, international organizations, the private sector, and NGOs; -working on ways to reduce the cost of connectivity for developing countries; -supporting community access programs; -encouraging research and development on technology and applications adapted to specific requirements in developing countries; -improving interoperability of networks, services, and applications; -encouraging the production of locally relevant and informative content including in the development of the content in various mother tongues.

- Building human capacity: -focusing on basic education as well as increased opportunities for life-long learning, with a particular emphasis on development of IT skills; -assisting the development of a pool of trained professionals in IT and other relevant policy areas and regulatory matters; -developing innovative approaches to extend the traditional reach of technical assistance, including distance learning and community-based training; -networking of public institutions and communities, including schools, research centers and universities.

- Encouraging participation in global e-commerce networks: -assessing and increasing e-commerce readiness and use, through provision of advice to start-up businesses in developing countries, and through mobilization of resources to help businesses to use IT to improve their efficiency and access to new markets. -ensuring

that the "rules of the game" as they are emerging are consistent with development efforts, and building developing country capacity to play a constructive role in determining these rules.

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