

Perspective from the Global Alliance, “Significance of the G3ict Initiative”

Sarbuland Khan, Executive Coordinator, Global Alliance for ICT and Development

I want you to hear the Secretary General in a recorded message which he sent to the Global Alliance’s first meeting in Silicone Valley less than a month ago, and I think this is highly relevant for more understanding of the broad political context in the commitment of the United Nations at the highest level and for people to understand where we are coming from.

Audio Message:

The Information and Communication Technologies have a central role to play in the principle development of_____. The international consensus on this point is clear. We see this at the 2000 Summit and at the 2005 World Summit and we see it in the two cases of the World Summit on the Information Society. With the launch of the Global Alliance of ICT and Development last March, the international community has taken the consensus a crucial step further. The Alliance is well placed to promote the use of ICT in fighting poverty, illiteracy, disease, protecting the environment, and empowering women and girls. It is important that you work as a true partnership of all essential stakeholders, government, civil society, the private sector, academia and others. All of you are needed in order to succeed. So let us use all our energy and innovation to harness ICTs for the worthwhile Millennium Development Goals. Let us turn the digital divide into digital opportunity. Let us promote new models, public policies and technology solutions in the global approach to development. The United Nations family is a willing and able partner in that course. I send you my best wishes for a successful meeting and I look forward to hearing your progress. Thank you very much.

Sarbuland Khan

Let me say that the Secretary General personally enforced this Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technology that was launched by the previous Secretary General last June in Kuala Lumpur as a network of networks enabling members

of the international community and private sector, civil society and your government and international organizations to come together around a single platform to advance the application of information and communication technology in the service of development and in particular the development of the Millennium Development Goals. There are two key elements in the Millennium Development Goals. One is to reduce the people living in poverty by half by 2015, and the other is to reach out to the disadvantaged, marginalized groups who do not have access to information technology in the developing world and even in the advanced countries; therefore, this alliance has functioned over the last 8 or 9 months to bring together partners around very clear specific issues with the common goal and a common interest to earn advancement towards that goal, and this question of people or persons living in disability is more of the basic issue that the government, that the United Nations has been working on that would last many years through the leadership of our colleagues in the Secretariat in the Commensurate Disability. It is under the leadership of the political side of the government and Ambassador Gallegos who was the Ambassador of the Ad Hoc Committee on Persons with Disabilities and the goal here is to really try and extend the hope to the circle and bring them not only to the government and the international institutions but also to the other key stakeholders, and the most important among them is the private sector, who is going to deliver, with the help of the political environment, a common standard so that the whole movement can advance with a clear result in the business. The Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies embodies the commitment of the United Nations and the Global Alliance for ICT and Development to fostering inclusive information technology in the society that empowers all people including the persons with disabilities.

In this age of connectivity and digital opportunities, information and communication technologies have gained momentum and wider acceptance in accelerating development. Non-traditional and technological solutions are now being integrated into the efforts to solve the long-standing problem of poverty, inequality and under development. With the World Summit on Information Society, the foundation of bridging the digital divide and

sharing digital opportunities is in place. The world community has vowed to put ICT as the service for development.

Focusing on and addressing disability issues within the context of the information society was recognized by the international organizations, governments, the private sectors, civil societies and the NGOs, as well as other stakeholders during the Geneva-Tunis Summit. As reflected in the Geneva Principle, the world community committed in building the information society to pay and I quote, “particular attention to the special needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups of society, including migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees, unemployed and underprivileged people, minorities and nomadic people. We shall also recognize the special needs of older persons and persons with disabilities.” This is from the Geneva Principle of the Summit. The Geneva Plan of Action called on addressing the special requirements of disadvantage groups including persons with disability through appropriate educational and legislative measures to insure their full inclusion in the society. It also emphasized the need for access for information knowledge by promoting research and development to facilitate the accessibility of ICT for all. Furthermore, it called for innovative applications that would benefit disabled persons particularly in the area of E-employment and local content. The commitment to promoting the welfare of disabled persons was renewed during the Tunis Summit in Tunis in 2005. The International Committee vowed to promote universal equitable and assertive technology for all people, especially those with disabilities everywhere, to insure the benefits are more evenly distributed within the society, and to bridge the digital divide in order to create digital opportunities for all and benefits offered by ICT development. We also reaffirm the responsibility to hit the target of the Geneva Plan of Action and emphasize building ICT capacities in the use of ICTs by all, including persons with disability with special attention for the formulation of universal design, concepts and assertive technology that promotes access to people with disability.

I thought I would bring to your attention this very broad, very formed, and very clear international consensus which was laid down by the Geneva and Tunis Summit at the highest level of government with full participation of the private sectors and civil society

together with the other stakeholders over the last few years. Now, this Global Initiative, which we are here to launch, is the step forward to fulfilling this commitment. Not only to what we have agreed in the World Summit but also as a moral responsibility of giving voice to a person with disability and empowering them with ICTs and integrating them into our society.

Indeed, persons with disabilities are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as all other human beings. Notwithstanding society's best intentions, however, reality is that persons with disabilities struggle in achieving a full and equitable participation in society. Handicapped by existing physical and social barriers, they are often excluded in their community, sometimes suffering alienation and isolation and can even live a reduced quality of life. There are more than 600 million people in the world, almost 10% of the population, who suffer from life-altering disability. In most countries, one of the 10 has physical, mental or sensory impairment. Exacerbating the situation is the fact that 80% of all disabled persons living in the developing community live in poor conditions. Clearly, development programs and strategies that integrate ICT should be able to include disability issues in order to succeed. While the Millennium Development Goals do not make a direct reference to the disabled persons, achieving them with an innovation application to ICT will have profound implication on the welfare of the disabled person. For example, Goal 1 is to eradicate extreme poverty. Over 480 million disabled persons live in the developing world, and the number of persons with disability continues to increase due to conditions of hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

Goal 2 is to achieve universal primary education. According to UNESCO, only 1% to 2% of children with disability who live in a developing country receive education. That is based on the estimate UNFPA (United Nations Fund for Population Activity), and around 20 million women a year suffer disability and long-term complication as a result of pregnancy and child birth, and abnormal pre-natal events have been identified as one of the causes of disabilities in children, particularly in a developing country.

The task is insuring that a person with disability should be empowered and fully integrated in the society, with greatest commitment of all stakeholders, including the international community, the public sector, the private sector and civil society.

Goal 8, which brings together the whole Global Community, calls for developing a global partnership for development. Clearly, this is a need which has to be fulfilled if the other goals are to be achieved. Developing a global partnership for development, particularly in the area of ICT development is the underlying principle behind the establishment of the Global Alliance partnership for ICT and Development.

As you may be aware, this initiative that is being launched today is an advocacy partnership initiative of the Global Alliance. I would not like to go in detail now to describe the Alliance itself; I think there will be available materials here and some books which will describe a little bit of what the Global Alliance function is, but this is an open platform network of networks available to all of you to facilitate in accordance with your capacity and willingness to contribute. With very little budget, with very little resources, very little expertise, we are able to bring partners to the table because they have that ability, having the universal access around the world to all stakeholders, and also the objectivity, the mentality, and the ability to convene. That makes it easier for us to bring people around and let them go out into the world trying to do it themselves. So I welcome you all with these few words and I very much hope that you will have a successful conference and we will see results from this very important issue. Thank you.

Concluding Remarks

Sarbuland Khan, Executive Coordinator, Global Alliance for ICT and Development

What we have seen today is a demonstration of the ability of partnership of this kind to produce a real result and real synergies and osmosis of mind. The reminding me of 2002, when we were in a seminar partnership on wireless technology in response to the Secretary General's challenge to Silicon Valley to bring wireless technology to the developing world, and if you see the progress that has made in the past 5 years, it's a

remarkable thing that has taken place both in legislation, in standardization, investment and commitment by the private sectors, and in terms of the international commitment, and the results have been remarkable in Africa. The highest rate of growth of mobile telephones is not in the United States or in China, but in Africa and in South Asia today. If we can demonstrate that we can do the same in assistive technologies 4 to 5 years down the line that the developing world leads the way and becomes the cutting edge, I think we have achieved our objective. I would like to present this challenge on behalf of the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to all of you and to others as well, that let us join hands in research and development, in legislative effort, in creating the relevant, the great environment, in creating the relevant institution in capacity building, and in terms of investment that is required both by the private sector and also by the civil society for the effort that is needed to bring about the revolutionary advance in assistive technology that they have already achieved in mobile telephones and that we be likely to achieve in the access to internet. We can achieve the goals provided the by remaining committed together in order to make this happen. I can assure you that on behalf of the United Nation and the Secretary General, the United Nations family is ready to be a very strong partner for this.