



**STATEMENT BY MRS. RUCHI GHANSHYAM, MINISTER, ON  
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT: A REGIONAL  
PERSPECTIVE AT GENERAL SEGMENT OF THE ECOSOC SUBSTANTIVE  
SESSION 2004 ON JULY 16, 2004**

Mr. President,

My delegation is happy to participate in the discussion in the Council on a theme of considerable importance and interest to all developing countries. We find that the Secretary General's report on Information and Communication Technologies and Digital Divide provides a vivid picture of the ever-increasing disparities in this area. It is a matter of concern that in an increasingly globalised world significant gaps persist in all regions between and within countries in levels of progress in ICT Development. We should give thought to the report's observation that the world's poor could be even more marginalised in a knowledge-based globalised economy. It is also worrisome that the access of people to digital opportunities remains one of the wide-ranging and profound challenges posed by the "digital divide".

Mr. President,

We find ourselves in agreement with the Secretary General that the development of ICTs is not an end in itself but is a means towards achieving a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional information society. The development potential of the ICTs is obvious. The developing countries missed the development bus at the time of the industrial revolution and on other occasions in the past. We cannot allow this technological revolution to leave us behind, for this time the gap that is being created may be too large to bridge. Given the pace of the revolutionary changes in the field of ICT, the "digital divide" widens every day, demonstrating the imperative for concerted action by the international community as a matter of utmost urgency. At the same time, it is important to reach a consensus on how to adequately harness the potential of ICT for assisting developing countries in their efforts to secure a better standard of living for their people. The United Nations has indeed a crucial role to play in making ICT work for the promotion of the developmental efforts of developing countries.

Mr. President,

Information and Communication Technology is a high priority area for India. We have embarked on attaining the target of "IT for All" at the national level by 2008 so that the benefits of this technology reach the common man in the remotest parts of the country. India's strategy in this regard focuses on developing the necessary IT infrastructure and enhancing human capacity. A mass campaign for IT awareness, the establishment of IT kiosks, promotion of IT education in all schools and colleges, the establishment of National and State level Digital Libraries and the promotion of IT for agriculture and integrated rural development, including through Wired Villages have brought about a high degree of awareness and increase in usage of

IT across the country. We are also committed to e-governance which brings people and government even closer to each other.

The national system of innovation evolved over time as an outcome of the policies initiated by the Government has been instrumental in facilitating India's IT success. These include, but are not limited to, development of a system of higher education in engineering and technical disciplines, creation of an institutional infrastructure for S&T policy making and implementation, building centres of excellence and numerous other institutions for technology development. In addition, the institutional interventions like the setting up of the software technology parks were highly helpful for IT exports. Thus, India's IT success is a typical case of pro-active state intervention wherein the Government laid the foundation and created the facilitating environment and the industry took off with greater participation by the private sector and increased world demand.

The IT industry is income-generating and can contribute to economic growth of a country. Electronics and Information Technology is the fastest growing segment of Indian industry both in terms of production and exports. Today, the electronics industry is completely delicensed with the exception of aerospace and defence electronics, and along with the liberalisation in foreign investment and export-import policies of the entire economy, this sector is attracting considerable interest not only as a vast market but also as potential production base by international companies. In recent times, software development and IT enabled services have emerged as a niche opportunity for India in the global context. The Government is taking all necessary steps to make India a major power in global information technology and a front-runner in the age of Information Revolution. The Government has announced promotion of Information Technology as one of the five top priorities of the country and constituted a National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development. The gross revenue of the IT software and services industry in India during the fiscal year 2003-'04 was estimated to be over US \$ 15.9 billion. Exports contributed US \$ 12.5 billion to this figure. The performance of the Indian industry derives from its quality and its delivery of high-end requirements. This has led to an increasing number of international companies outsourcing their critical software requirements from India.

The ICT revolution is opening up new opportunities for growth and development in many parts of the world. In many societies it is giving a new meaning to the term "empowerment" by seeking to make a difference in the lives of millions of people enabling them to take greater advantage of emerging opportunities. The rapid advances in the field of ICT are showing us the potential for "leap-frogging" stages of technological development. India is, by its own experience, able to attest the important role which can be played by ICT in promoting development. Nevertheless, it needs to be said that ICT by itself cannot solve the problems of poverty and under-development - a judicious blend of emphasis on provision of basic social, education and health services along with the development of both brick and click industries is necessary in any strategy for sustained human development and poverty reduction.

Mr. President,

We are heartened to note from the report that more and more projects undertaken by the regional commissions have sought to address cutting-edge-issues in development such as ICT capacity-building; sustainable management of natural resources and their efficient use; trade facilitation and electronic business; capacity building for managing globalization; and promoting technologies for employment and poverty alleviation. We also agree with the report that the most significant and valuable contribution that the regional commissions can make in support of their respective membership is by helping anchor their policy perspectives and analytical work

relating to ICTs and the information societies firmly on the social economic and cultural imperatives that are unique to each region/sub-region and country.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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