

December 9, 2005

The Honorable Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General

United Nations

100 United Nations Plaza

48th Street and First Avenue

New York, NY 10001

U.S.A.

Naoyuki Akikusa
Chairman

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

I write to you today in my capacity as chairman of the Global Information Infrastructure Commission, a confederation of chief executive officers of information and communications technology (ICT) companies from throughout the world that, since 1995, has been dedicated to fostering the diffusion of communications and computing capabilities in nations underserved by such capabilities.

My purpose is twofold. First, I wish to commend you for your leadership in overseeing the successful conclusion of the World Summit on the Information Society. Second, I would like to offer suggestions regarding a proposed Internet Governance Forum.

World Summit on the Information Society. With regard to the just-concluded Summit, I think it can be fairly said that never before in the annals of international summitry have so many national leaders come together over such a protracted period as the Summit occupied to acknowledge and address the pivotal role that telecommunications and modern day information appliances can and should play in international economic and social development. Although it has taken most observers decades to recognize, the world truly has – since the invention of the transistor in 1948 and the attendant ascendancy of digital electronics – been in the midst of a paradigm shift from an “industrial” to a new age, variously described as an “information,” “digital,” “networked,” or “knowledge” one. Indeed, since the idea of a World Summit on the Information Society was born seven years ago, exponential changes have occurred in ICT capabilities and these have radically enhanced the way people work and conduct their everyday affairs. A major exception to this rule, of course, continues to be found in least developed and emerging market nations. As fast as the economically developed nations of the world have been propelled forward by information and communications technologies, the least developed and largely unconnected nations of the world have been falling behind. Thanks to the Summit,

contentious as its processes and debates may have seemed to some, there is less doubt than ever before that the diffusion of capabilities based on information and communications technologies must be part and parcel to international development activity, generally, and more specifically to fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals. The enhanced awareness that has been produced by the World Summit on the Information Society is a major accomplishment, and an essential precursor of future action. For this I commend you, International Telecommunication Union Secretary General Utsumi, and your other colleagues throughout the United Nations family.

Internet Governance Forum. At the conclusion of the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis last month, as you know, the national delegates thereto formally adopted a “Tunis Agenda for the Information Society” and therein asked you to establish and convene an Internet Governance Forum. My feeling – and that of most heads of ICT-related business firms, I believe – is that the call for such a Forum was highly prudent and is deserving of your favorable consideration.

In establishing and calling for the convening of an Internet Governance Forum, furthermore, I respectfully recommend you take special steps to assure participation by private sector representatives that is on an equal footing to that of national government representatives and others. The Internet as we know it today and almost all we associate with the “information society” has sprung largely from and been based on private sector investment. Indeed, only the private sector possesses the resources – not just financial ones, but human and technological ones, as well – with which to develop, manage, and modernize the world’s information infrastructure. Accordingly, representatives of business (both as providers and users of the infrastructure) are deserving of places at the Forum that are equal to those of government representatives and others. One way of fostering this kind of participation, I believe, would be to designate a single official within the administrative bureau of the Forum to be responsible for fostering and coordinating private sector involvement, as well as for making all necessary logistical arrangements for such participation. Importantly, I believe this responsibility should be carried out within the administrative machinery of the Forum and be totally divorced from the processes by which business firms and associations thereof, individually and collectively, develop and advocate substantive positions on issues under discussion in the Forum.

Secondly, and again with respect, I encourage you, as you establish the Forum, to keep in mind the overarching purposes of the World Summit on the Information Society, from which the need for a Forum arose. Similarly, I ask you to keep in mind the development

oriented purposes of the soon-to-expire United Nations Information and Communications Technology Task Force. The ends toward which the Summit was originally directed were, of course, closely tied to the Millennium Development Goals and had to do with fostering the diffusion of ICT capabilities to ICT-underserved regions, nations, and communities of the world. My recommendation, accordingly, is for you to direct or otherwise encourage the administrators of the Forum to adopt a sense of proportionality as they develop agenda and work programs. By “a sense of proportionality” I refer to the need to keep in mind the reality that the Internet and the “information society” of which it is a part are evolutionary phenomena. If the Forum is to serve beneficial ends, ones directly linked to the Millennium Development Goals, it must concentrate on that part of the Internet and “information society” evolutionary continuum that is in greatest need of being addressed and is closest to those who, at present, are largely unconnected to the increasingly global economy because of their lack of access to communications conduits, network-connecting information appliances, and, of course, the Internet. Absent such direction, I fear, the focus of the Forum may be diverted to other issues. I think we both would like to see the Forum address Internet Governance issues of interest to those parts of the world with advanced levels of access to the Internet and other ICT capabilities, as well as to the vast numbers of the world’s inhabitants living on the trailing edge of technology.

Thank you again, Mr. Secretary-General, for your leadership and vision with regard to tapping the economic and social development potential of information and communications technologies. Thank you, too, for your consideration of my thoughts regarding the proposed Internet Governance Forum. My colleagues and I within the Global Information Infrastructure Commission stand ready to be of whatever assistance we can be as you and others within the United Nations establish and convene the Forum.

Respectfully yours,



Naoyuki Akikusa

Chairman

Global Information Infrastructure Commission