

AG/DEC. 46 (XXXVI-O/06)

DECLARATION OF SANTO DOMINGO:
GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY

(Adopted at the fourth plenary session, held on June 6, 2006)

THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND HEADS OF DELEGATION OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS), meeting in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, on the occasion of the thirty-sixth regular session of the General Assembly,

RECALLING that the Charter of the OAS proclaims that the historic mission of the Americas is to offer human beings a land of liberty and a favorable environment for the development of their personality and the realization of their just aspirations;

REAFFIRMING their commitment, expressed in the OAS Charter, to give primary importance within their development plans to the encouragement of education, science, technology, and culture, oriented toward the overall improvement of the individual, and as a foundation for democracy, social justice, and progress;

RECOGNIZING that humankind is moving rapidly toward a new development model focused on the human person, based on the intensive use of knowledge and innovation, and with the capacity of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to produce, access, and disseminate knowledge, as an important tool for strengthening democratic governance, bringing about equitable and sustainable development in the Americas, and reducing the digital divide;

MINDFUL of the existence of the digital divide, recognized in the context of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and of the importance of bridging it within and between countries in order to contribute to reaching common objectives of fair, equitable, and sustainable development, including the reduction of poverty, inequalities, and social exclusion, for all the peoples of the Americas, through integral development plans that include strategies for reducing such a divide;

CONVINCED that the development of and equitable and universal access to the knowledge-based society constitutes a challenge and an opportunity that helps us to address the social, economic, and political goals of the countries of the Americas;

REAFFIRMING their commitment to promote equity, social justice, and universal access to ICTs, as well as their commitment to internationally agreed development objectives, including those of the United Nations Millennium Declaration;

BEARING IN MIND that the Inter-American Democratic Charter states that the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it, and that democracy is essential for their social, political, and economic development; and, in that sense, that it affirms that democracy and social and economic development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing;

REITERATING that the Inter-American Democratic Charter establishes that it is the right and responsibility of all citizens to participate in decisions relating to their own development. This is also a necessary condition for the full and effective exercise of democracy. Promoting and fostering diverse forms of participation strengthens democracy;

REITERATING ALSO that the Inter-American Democratic Charter states that transparency in government activities, probity and responsible public administration on the part of governments, and respect for social rights and freedom of expression and the press are essential components of the exercise of democracy;

RECOGNIZING that good public administration requires effective, representative, transparent, and publicly accountable government institutions at all levels, citizen participation, effective checks and balances, and the balance and separation of powers. In this context, accountability and citizen participation, in accordance with national laws, in the follow-up, oversight, and evaluation of public administration, as an active contribution to the prevention and elimination of corruption, are tools for promoting the transparency, efficiency, and responsibility of the region's governments, and that ICTs can play an important role in this regard;

CONSIDERING that the importance of incorporating ICTs into the region's political, economic, and social development efforts has been supported by the Summits of the Americas since the First Summit, held in Miami in 1994; was emphasized in the declaration on connectivity of the Third Summit, held in Quebec City in 2001; and was reaffirmed at the Fourth Summit, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in November 2005;

CONSIDERING ALSO that the Declaration of Mar del Plata establishes that every effort must be made to take advantage of the possibilities offered by ICTs to increase efficiency and transparency in the public sector and to facilitate the participation of citizens in public life, thereby helping to strengthen democratic governance; and recognizing that democratic governance is interconnected with economic and social development in the region, as was recognized in its Plan of Action;

TAKING NOTE of the commitments of the Summits of the Americas, in which the Presidents and Heads of State of the Americas identified education as the linchpin of hemispheric progress and human development, which impacts the political, social, economic, and democratic life of our societies; and highlighting the positive contribution ICTs can make to addressing the needs of the region's education systems;

NOTING that the "Declaration of Santiago on Democracy and Public Trust: A New Commitment to Good Governance for the Americas" [AG/DEC. 31 (XXXIII-O/03)] recognizes the need to define an agenda for good governance for the Hemisphere that addresses political, economic, and social challenges and fosters credibility and public trust in democratic institutions;

REITERATING the commitment made in the "Declaration of Florida: Delivering the Benefits of Democracy" [AG/DEC. 41 (XXXV-O/05)] to advance the prosperity, democratic values, democratic institutions, and security of our Hemisphere; and considering that ICTs can play a valuable role in this regard;

CONVINCED, as also stated in the Declaration of Florida, that countries must be governed democratically, with full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, the separation of powers and independence of the judiciary, and democratic institutions, and that the governments of the Americas have an obligation under the OAS Charter and the

Inter-American Democratic Charter to promote and defend democracy and must be answerable to their peoples;

REAFFIRMING the commitment made in the Declaration of Florida to adopt and implement those actions required to generate productive employment, reduce poverty, and, especially, eradicate extreme poverty, while taking into account the different economic realities and conditions of the countries of the Hemisphere, and that the elimination of extreme poverty is essential to the promotion and consolidation of democracy and constitutes a common and shared responsibility of the American states;

NOTING Advisory Opinion OC-5/85 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, and resolutions AG/RES. 2121 (XXXV-O/05), "Access to Public Information: Strengthening Democracy"; AG/RES. 2135 (XXXV-O/05), "Support for and Monitoring of Activities Related to the World Summit on the Information Society"; and AG/RES. 2066 (XXXV-O/05), "Dissemination of Information on the Inter-American System for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Educational Institutions in the Countries of the Hemisphere";

NOTING ALSO that resolution AG/RES. 2119 (XXXV-O/05), "Promotion and Strengthening of Democracy," requests that the General Secretariat, through the appropriate offices, take into account in its activities the contribution that ICTs can make to developing more just, open, and democratic societies;

CONSIDERING that the Declaration of Mar del Plata recognizes the important link between culture and development;

RECOGNIZING that the human person is the central subject of the development process and that development policy should therefore make the human person the main participant in and beneficiary of development; for that reason we affirm that the implementation of the knowledge-based society agenda should support these objectives;

REAFFIRMING, as mentioned in the Geneva Declaration of Principles of the WSIS, "Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium," adopted in 2003, that cultural diversity is the common heritage of humankind. The knowledge-based society should be founded on and stimulate respect for cultural identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, traditions, and religions, and foster dialogue among cultures and civilizations;

REAFFIRMING ALSO, as indicated in the Geneva Declaration of Principles, that it is essential to promote the production of and accessibility to all content—educational, scientific, cultural, or recreational—in diverse languages and formats. The development of local content suited to domestic or regional needs will encourage social and economic development and will stimulate participation by all stakeholders, including people living in rural, remote, and marginal areas;

RECOGNIZING the outcomes of the WSIS, which highlighted the use of ICTs as an enabler that will assist member countries in achieving internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals;

MINDFUL that the Geneva Declaration of Principles states that regional integration contributes to the development of the global information society and makes strong cooperation within and among regions indispensable. Regional dialogue should contribute to national

capacity-building and to the alignment of national strategies with the goals of the Declaration of Principles in a compatible way, while respecting national and regional particularities;

RECOGNIZING that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers;

RECOGNIZING ALSO the contribution of ICTs as fundamental tools for strengthening democracy in the Hemisphere;

UNDERSCORING that access to information and the exchange and creation of knowledge are important elements of a free, democratic, and pluralistic society, and that the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web, without political censorship, can contribute to the development of a democratic future and the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and the free flow of information and ideas for all the peoples of the Americas, a basic premise of knowledge-based societies;

REITERATING, as established in the Geneva Declaration of Principles, that the use of ICTs and content creation should respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others, including personal privacy and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, in conformity with relevant international instruments;

REITERATING ALSO their ongoing concern over the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, as well as of environmental and other disasters, which have devastating effects and affect sustainable development in the region and the physical and psychological integrity of its inhabitants;

AWARE that ICTs should be regarded as tools and not as an end in themselves, as expressed in the Geneva Declaration of Principles. Under favorable conditions, these technologies can be a powerful instrument, increasing productivity, generating economic growth, job creation, and employability, and improving the quality of life of all. They can also promote dialogue among people, nations, and civilizations;

HIGHLIGHTING the importance of ICTs for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises and other units of production, to improve their capacities and competitiveness;

NOTING that the Latin American and Caribbean member states of the United Nations adopted the Plan of Action for the Information Society (eLAC 2007), in Rio de Janeiro in June 2005, as a result of a regional process that began in Bávaro, Dominican Republic, in 2003;

RECALLING that the Ministers of Science and Technology, the Ministers of Education, and the Ministers of Labor of the Americas recognized, in the Declaration of Lima of November 2004, the Declaration of Scarborough and Commitments to Action of August 2005, and the Declaration of Mexico of September 2005, the fundamental role that ICTs play in implementing their respective agendas;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT that the February 2006 Declaration of San José of the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) recognizes significant progress made in connectivity in the region and the need to proceed with the implementation of the second phase of the Agenda for Connectivity in the Americas and the Plan of Action of Quito;

NOTING the commitments to improve coordination and share best practices made by multilateral and bilateral development and financial institutions as a result of the Rome Declaration on Harmonization, of February 2003;

RECOGNIZING that all the peoples of the Americas have contributed significantly, throughout their rich history, to the development of knowledge, by generating scientific, technological, and cultural know-how, which has served as a basis and a foundation for the development of ICTs;

BEARING IN MIND that it is necessary, as the case may be, that states develop national policies and strategies, as well as establish or better their legislation and its legal and regulatory frameworks that provide juridical security, for the development of the knowledge-based society;

VALUING the importance of national experiences that contribute to universalizing access to information and knowledge and to reducing the digital and social divides, such as programs of access to ICTs, among others digital literacy plans, multipurpose public community access sites, the use of open-source and proprietary software, and e-government;

REITERATING, as established in the Geneva Declaration of Principles, that intellectual property protection is important to encourage innovation and creativity in the knowledge-based society; similarly, the wide dissemination, diffusion, and sharing of knowledge is important to encourage innovation and creativity. Facilitating meaningful participation by all in intellectual property issues and knowledge-sharing through full awareness and capacity-building is a fundamental part of an inclusive knowledge-based society;

RECOGNIZING the important role played in Latin America and the Caribbean by the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA), including the bringing together of stakeholders from different sectors to implement innovative technology initiatives that contribute to the development of the region and to its insertion into the knowledge-based society, as part of the connectivity agenda for the Hemisphere established during the Third Summit of the Americas (Quebec City, 2001);

RECOGNIZING ALSO the contributions to the development and implementation of the knowledge-based society agenda of international financial institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and the Andean Development Corporation, and other multilateral organizations, especially those of the United Nations system, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC);

MINDFUL that access to and application of ICTs have contributed to the capacity of the countries of the region to make progress in political, social, economic, and cultural processes; and recognizing the urgency of developing an appropriate process for the Americas, in order to advance toward the fulfillment of the commitments made in high-level declarations on the expansion of the knowledge-based society; and

RECOGNIZING that building an inclusive knowledge-based society requires new forms of solidarity, partnership, and cooperation among governments and other stakeholders, i.e., the private sector, civil society, and international organizations,

DECLARE:

1. Their emphasis on the importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a crosscutting tool for achieving equitable and sustainable development and strengthening good governance and the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as the need to work intensely to ensure that every person in the Americas, in particular those in situations of vulnerability and with special needs, may participate in the benefits generated by the knowledge-based society.

2. Their request that the organs, agencies, and entities of the Organization of American States (OAS) continue to support the incorporation of ICTs into national development plans, particularly in public-institution modernization processes, favoring those that consider the training of public-sector employees and that are necessary to reinforce good governance and a climate of democracy, and to promote transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and efficiency in the management and provision of services in the public sector, so as to meet the needs and aspirations of every person.

3. Their commitment to ensure that special attention is given to state modernization through the design and implementation of e-government strategies, including capacity-building programs for public employees, in order to improve the delivery of public services and information to the population as a whole, in particular for groups in greatest need, and enhance transparency and accountability.

4. Their commitment also to develop ICTs as a tool for promoting and fostering ongoing, ethical, and responsible participation by the citizenry within a legal framework conforming to the respective constitutional order, particularly by persons belonging to groups in situations of vulnerability or with special needs, in decisions concerning their own development, which is, in turn, a necessary condition for the full and effective exercise of democracy.

5. Their commitment, consistent with the spirit of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to guarantee the liberty of every person to enjoy freedom of expression, including access to uncensored political debate and the free exchange of ideas through all forms of mass media, including the Internet.

6. Their resolve to develop and encourage strategies and best practices that enhance the possibility of every person to engage actively in the exchange of opinions, including political discourse, through the Internet or other technological communications media, guaranteeing freedom of investigation, of opinion, and of the expression and dissemination of ideas, as essential components of the knowledge-based society.

7. Their commitment to actively foster a dynamic and enabling environment for regional and international cooperation, and to urge the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, and regional and international institutions, including financial institutions, with a view to implementing the development of complementary strategies that promote freedom of expression and information on the Internet and other technological communications media and universal access to the Internet for all the peoples of the Americas.

8. Their reaffirmation of the importance of multilingualism and, as such, the need to create, diversify, and disseminate the contents of the Internet in the different languages spoken in the Hemisphere, including the official languages of the OAS, in order to build an integrative knowledge-based society.

9. Their determination to facilitate universal access to ICTs, making them available to all the countries of the region and all their citizens through, among other means, multipurpose public community access sites, community-based radio and TV stations, and other wire-based technologies, such as community-based telephony, or wireless technologies, taking into account the sustainability and permanent development of these projects and initiatives.

10. Their request that the Secretary General, taking into account the OAS Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter, promote, by means of suitable programs, the use of ICTs to foster participation by every person in public life, a building block of democratic governance.

11. That they will promote the utilization of ICTs for the follow-up, oversight, and evaluation of public administration by the citizenry, in order to achieve a transparent and efficient government and the strengthening of democracy.

12. Their commitment to enhance and expand all programs and initiatives aimed at redressing inequalities and poverty which strengthen the democratic institutional system in the region, using ICTs as a development tool, taking into account in particular the challenges faced by those persons belonging to groups in situations of vulnerability or with special needs.

13. Their recognition of the importance of the gender perspective and the need to enhance women's equitable access to the benefits of ICTs, and to ensure that ICTs can become a central tool for the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality. Policies, programs, and projects need to ensure that gender differences and inequalities in access to and use of ICTs are identified and fully addressed.

14. Their request to the OAS to continue, through its General Secretariat, in particular the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI), and its specialized commissions and committees, such as the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) and the Inter-American Committee on Science and Technology (COMCYT), coordinating regional efforts to develop initiatives and identify additional resources to provide greater access to ICTs and their use and benefits, thus contributing to bridging the digital divide and strengthening skills for the 21st century workforce.

15. Their continued conviction, in keeping with the Tunis Commitment of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), adopted in 2005, that governments, the private sector, civil society, the scientific and academic communities, and users can utilize various technologies and licensing models, including those developed under proprietary schemes and those developed under open-source and free modalities, in accordance with their interests and with the need to have reliable services and implement effective programs for their people. Taking into account the importance of proprietary software in the markets of the countries, they reiterate as well the need to encourage and foster collaborative development, interoperative platforms, and free and open-source software, in ways that reflect the possibilities of different software models, notably for education, science, and digital inclusion programs.

16. Their reaffirmation also of the principles, enunciated in the Geneva and Tunis phases of the WSIS, that the Internet has evolved into a global facility available to the public and that its governance should constitute a core issue of the information society agenda. The international management of the Internet should be multilateral, transparent, and democratic, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society, and international

organizations. It should ensure an equitable distribution of resources, facilitate access for all, and ensure the stable and secure functioning of the Internet, taking into account multilingualism.

17. Their request to the Secretary General to continue, through the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) and the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), to support measures to increase access to schooling and the quality of education at all levels—essential factors in increasing human productivity—particularly for the most vulnerable groups, as well as efforts to ensure that inter-American action programs and horizontal cooperation strategies strengthen the quality of teaching processes in formal education and continuing and adult education, retraining, and lifelong learning, including the use of new ICTs.

18. Their reaffirmation of the importance of incorporating new ICTs into the capacity-building of our citizens, as established in the Plan of Action of the Fourth Summit of the Americas, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

19. Their invitation to the institutions of higher education of the Americas to continue to contribute fully to the capacity-building of human resources in the areas of good governance and development in the knowledge-based society.

20. Their heightened commitment to foster literacy as well as investment in science, technology, mathematics, engineering, and innovation in primary, secondary, and higher education, as the case may be, in keeping with the November 2004 Declaration of Lima of the Ministers of Science and Technology, and as essential prerequisites for the evolution of the knowledge-based society.

21. Their reaffirmation of the Tunis Commitment to promote universal, ubiquitous, equitable, and affordable access to ICTs, especially universal design and assistive technologies, for all people, especially those with disabilities, everywhere, to ensure that the benefits are more evenly distributed between and within societies, and to bridge the digital divide in order to create digital opportunities for all and to benefit from the potential offered by ICTs for development.

22. Their instruction to the OAS to continue, through the CIE, to promote in the hemispheric and subregional programs arising from the mandates of the Summits of the Americas the appropriate use of ICTs in education, adapting them to the requirements of the knowledge-based society and to local contexts, thus providing opportunities and benefits to every person, in particular to those populations excluded from social and economic development.

23. Their support for the efforts to protect and promote cultural diversity, as well as cultural identities, within the knowledge-based society, and, in this regard, their request to the General Secretariat, and in particular to the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development and the Inter-American Committee on Culture (ICC), that they continue supporting inter-American policies and programs that foster the development of culture in the region and consider the impact that ICTs can have on its multiple dimensions, such as the preservation and protection of national heritage, the enhancement of the dignity and identity of the peoples of the Americas, the creation of decent employment, and the overcoming of poverty.

24. Their emphatic interest in promoting increased ICT use by businesses, in particular micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises and other units of production, to enable them to prepare their workforce for the knowledge-based society and improve their output and competitiveness in national and international public and private markets.

25. Their renewed commitment to generate an environment conducive to the development of a competitive national scientific and technological industry that promotes private-sector innovation and investment and generates jobs, is responsive to the legitimate aspirations of all people to improve their lives, and contributes to economic development with social justice.

26. Their intent to cooperate and establish appropriate measures to prevent and mitigate the environmental impact of ICT-related products throughout their life cycle and at the stage of recycling and disposal, consistent with international law.

27. Their reaffirmation, in keeping with the November 2004 Declaration of Lima of the Ministers of Science and Technology, of the importance of designing and implementing programs to support the establishment of national innovation systems oriented toward the productive sector, with a view to improving its competitiveness through the use of ICTs, thus contributing to the integral development of our countries.

28. Their renewed commitment to undertake efforts to enhance disaster prevention, mitigation, and management, to integrate those efforts into development plans, and to promote the sharing of information, best practices, lessons learned, and technical skills related to disaster prevention, mitigation, and management; and their conviction that ICTs should be an important tool in the success of those efforts.

29. That it is of critical importance to continue the process of adopting in the region legislative, regulatory, and administrative frameworks that are transparent, efficient, and consistent, that offer juridical security, and that promote, among other things, competition, innovation, encouragement of investment, and universal access to services.

30. Their commitment to protect and encourage the innovation, creation, and production of knowledge, and of scientific and technological resources of all people, including indigenous peoples, and artisans, who make significant contributions to the development of the knowledge-based society.

31. Their request to the Permanent Council to consider the possibility of convening, with the assistance of the General Secretariat, an inter-American specialized conference or meeting, for the purpose of exchanging experiences, best practices, and other such information that may support efforts of the states to design or enhance, as the case may be, legislative, regulatory, and administrative frameworks with respect to ICTs, to enable them to better support advancing diverse topics associated with the expansion of the knowledge-based society and promote investment.

32. Their interest in taking advantage of existing experiences, in particular those of public institutions in the Americas, in the planning and implementation of national strategies for the knowledge-based society; and their instruction to CIDI and the General Secretariat to continue their horizontal cooperation activities.

33. Their instruction to the General Secretariat to promote the support of and synergies with international organizations, the private sector, academia, and civil society, in order to implement the commitments made in Santo Domingo, in terms of their comparative advantages, with special attention to the smallest and most vulnerable economies.

34. Their emphasis on the importance of regional collaborative networks for the development of and access to public goods and research which explore the possibilities offered

by ICTs to promote the dissemination and transfer of technologies on mutually agreed terms and that contribute to the integral development of the countries of the Hemisphere.

35. Their request to the OAS General Secretariat to include ICTs as a crosscutting element in the design of inter-American policies and programs related to good governance and equitable and sustainable development.

