



World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

PROGRAMME: No. 905 recorded 27 June 2003

GUEST: Guy-Olivier Segond
Special Ambassador
World Summit on the information Society

JOURNALISTS: Tony Jenkins, *Expresso*
Colum Lynch, *The Washington Post*

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

“GLOBALIZATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY”

When future historians sit down to define the times we live in, they will very likely refer to an ‘information revolution’ – much in the same way as the 19th and 20th centuries were shaped by the Industrial Revolution. Cellphones, teleconferencing, the Internet – all these Information and Communications Technologies – are rapidly becoming the essential utilities of our time. But how “public” are these utilities? Should the use of these technologies be regulated, and if so, how, and by whom? Should countries where people struggle for access to electricity and clean water invest in communications technology? In this edition of **World Chronicle**, these questions are explored in an interview with Guy-Olivier Segond, Special Ambassador for the World Summit on the Information Society.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 28:00
Producer: Michele Zaccheo
Director: Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant: Saliha Bouima

ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I am Michael Littlejohns and this is **World Chronicle**. When future historians sit down to define the times we live in today, they will very likely refer to an "Information Revolution" – much in the same way as the 19th and 20th centuries were shaped by the Industrial Revolution. Cellphones, teleconferencing, the Internet – all these information and communications technologies – are rapidly becoming the essential utilities of our time. But how "public" are these utilities? Should the use of these technologies be regulated, and if so, how, and by whom? Should countries, where people struggle for access to electricity and clean water, invest in communications technology? Today we're privileged to have as our guest Guy-Olivier Segond, Special Ambassador for the UN's upcoming World Summit on the Information Society. Joining us to talk to Mr. Segond are Tony Jenkins of Portugal's Expresso, and Colum Lynch of the Washington Post. Ambassador, welcome to **World Chronicle**. Ambassador, I saw in the quite voluminous documentation that we were given for this programme that you had referred to the injustice of the so-called "digital divide", and it isn't a question of a lack of resources, as you said, it's a lack of a policy perspective. What did you mean by that?

SEGOND: Well you know you can measure the digital divide in a very simple way. Today, 91 % of internet users are concentrated in the part of the world where you have 19% of the total population. So that means that 80% of the world population doesn't have access to knowledge. And that is an injustice. And of course it is an injustice that we have to fight and the fight that has been fought during the past ten years hasn't been that efficient because the digital divide is not narrowing, the digital divide is expanding. So that is one of the main subjects of the World Summit on Information Society.

LITTLEJOHNS: So who is actually to blame for that? Presumably a corporation like Microsoft does not see much profit in going to these countries that you just mentioned.

SEGOND: I don't think so. Nobody is to blame. In fact when you are traveling in these countries, mainly in the south, what you will see is that there is a strong demand, there is a strong curiosity for internet, for the access to the website and so on, but the people don't have the means to afford to pay for it. And so that is an important question of the summit because what we have tried up to now is North-South cooperation, but this North-South cooperation has not been that efficient. So what we should try now is probably have a new form of cooperation, a South-South cooperation, merging South, helping the less-advanced

South. This type of cooperation is probably more appropriate to the local condition of the South, the question of humidity, the question of dust. It is also probably more respectful of local condition, local knowledge, local language, and you have certain countries from the merging Souths like India, like Brazil, who are trying to find a new model, a sort of low cost computer. In India it is called a simple computer, "the Simputer"; in Brazil, it is called "popular computador" -- they offer the basic services of normal PC, but they do it at a price between one hundred and three hundred dollars.

LITTLEJOHNS: And these companies in India and Brazil -- they can supply these simple computers that you have mentioned and still make a profit?

SEGOND: Well I think so, because that is another point that has been studied by the UN ICT Task Force is to try to find a new business model for this type of merging market, or markets from the South, where you can have a huge market, and you can sell much more product at a lower price with probably having more or less the same margin of benefit.

LYNCH: One of the things about this whole sort of project that I find a little, kind of I guess, suspect is that it's just, like many other UN projects, wildly ambitious. I mean no one can object to the idea of promoting the dissemination of internet access to people in the Third World all over the world -- that this is obviously a good thing, but a lot of ideas that you are sort of promoting is having a greater role of sort of world leaders getting together and coming up [with] regulations on dealing with security issues, dealing with, sort of regulating, issues of free speech. I mean one of the nice things about the internet is that it is not that heavily regulated, and has been a great sort of force for political freedom in countries where there isn't a free press or anything like that, and the idea that we should be looking to governments to come together and set up guidelines on this, particularly at a period when this sort of technology is in its infancy, seems to me to sort of give the upper hand to governments over the people, in a sense that they are going to establish rules and regulations that advance their own interests. And I think that this is something that makes a lot of journalists and a lot of other people a little bit nervous about this whole project.

SEGOND: Well of course you have to understand that the summit has three main goals. The first goal, very important for the South, is access to knowledge to fight the digital divide. The second goal is to find a new business model and to discuss all these questions with a new formula with an association of the four big stake-holders: national governments, that is right, private sector, civil society, and international organization. And that is one of the characteristics of the World Summit on the Information Society, still it is an inter-

governmental process, but since the beginning it is open to the participation of private sectors, civil society and international organization. And of course the third main goal is to promote information society where you have freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of speech of course, but where you have also cultural diversity, and plurality of content.

LYNCH: Let me give you an example. In the United States, there are rules and regulations, laws set up by the government, and journalists like anybody else are obliged to obey those laws. But there are many times where the government have to weigh the balance of power between the press and government's institutions, and this is always a struggle, and it is always something that is fought out in the courts, it is fought out in the newspapers everyday, in the media. There is an ongoing sort of organic struggle that sort of takes place between the government and the media, and we feel that we make up our own rules. You know if we break the law, then we have to pay the consequences, but we don't like the idea that the government - we feel the governments should not have any role in regulating and in any way sort of defining what the rules of the games should be for journalism. And this is something that is at the heart of our government, this notion of different spheres of power. And the idea that an international organization comes up with rules and guidelines -- I mean I don't trust anybody but other journalists, to define what journalism should be about and what our use of saying the medium even on the internet, I mean we put out the paper but we also disseminate much of our work over the internet, and I would not like to see my own government and certainly not a sort of international body in any way interfering or doing anything involving sort of setting up any sort of rules of the road for me.

SEGOND: Yes, but you are a journalist, you are interested of course by the question of freedom of press, freedom of opinion.

LITTLEJOHNS: But so are you, aren't you?

SEGOND: No. I am interested too, but it is a UN World Summit on Information Society, right? And the road map for the UN is the Millennium Development Goal Declaration, right? And one of the tools to achieve these millennium goals are the information and communication technologies. Once again, for 80% of the world population, the important point is not the regulation of freedom of the press or freedom of expression, this is an old story debated about two decades ago, when UNESCO produced the so-called New World Information Order, or something like that. That is not the main purpose of this summit. The main purpose of this summit is to fight misery, to fight ignorance, to fight poverty and to use ICT, Information Communication Technology for development. That is the main point. Of

course among the other points, you had the question of a need for true and fair information society, you have to benefit the right of freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to communicate, and I agree with you -- it is not only a question of development, it is also a question of democracy and good governance and the measure of the flow of information in the society on the net is a good measure of accountability, transparency, democratic character of a government. But the main goal of this summit in this phase, is development through ICT.

JENKINS: Well I have many similar concerns to the ones that Colum has just raised and in fact it goes beyond freedom of the press to the issue of culture as a whole, and I will get to that in a moment, but if you are really concerned about giving access to the internet for this 80% of the world's population that doesn't have any access at the moment, I am wondering if you are not all sitting down and talking about the wrong issue, because one of the reasons that so many of these people don't have access to the internet isn't just because they don't have a computer, they don't have the electricity to run the computer in the first place. I mean shouldn't you all be sitting down and talking about rural electrification programmes? I mean -- In Haiti, for example, we are concerned about people chopping down the forests so they can cook. And they are trying to come up with methods to produce a stove or something that doesn't burn wood, but they don't have the natural gas, and they don't have the electricity, so something as basic as feeding themselves is a problem. Where do you get the energy supply from to drive the computers? And where do you get the architecture, if you like, of the internet? In other words the wire that they plug in to the computer so they can actually link into a server and get the information in the first place.

SEGOND: Yes, of course, I understand your point. If you want to help somebody, you first have to find that inlet -- that is the question of aid, for example. In this part, he has to be alive if you want to help him. If he is alive, you have to fight hunger. If he is alive, and he has three meals a day, he might still be in misery. Misery is more or less the product of ignorance and isolation. Through the networks, not only through internet, through radio, through different type of networks, you can get out of isolation, you can get have access to knowledge; and that is why one of the ideas of the summit is to privilege the internet into the schools, primary schools, secondary schools. It is also to use this ICT technology for improving health conditions through ES (Electronic Services?). It is to use when you start a small business through micro credit to help people to develop a sort of e-commerce or e-business. I don't say that it is the solution for all the problems but you can use ICT as a tool, not the tool, for development. And that is one of the main purposes of those summits. It is clear that you

need to have electricity, but you can have solar energy, you have different techniques that are already on the market.

JENKINS: Well, is it part of your brief then to look at those infrastructural problem is to how you actually feed the computers in the first place, give them the energy to make them work? Is that part of your task?

SEGOND: That is part of the task of the summit. But you have different techniques where you can produce energy through electrical-aided energy to water, electrical energy to generator, electrical energy through solar energy. You have different ways and means to add this energy.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Segond, those of us who live in New York or in Geneva are all very well aware of how email has changed the way we communicate. But the change is even more dramatic in places farther away from the centers of international politics and finance. Let's take a look at this brief video about internet access in Mongolia.

NARRATION: Built in the thirteenth century Kharkhorin is the ancient capital of Chinggis Khaan, Mongolia's famous ruler. Today it is a small town about four hundred kilometers from Ulanbaatar, the modern capital. Over the remains of the old royal palace now stands a monastery. For this joint Mongolian and German archaeology team, it is an exciting area full of ancient treasures. But even here modern communications technology is becoming available says archaeologist, Frithjof Spangenberg .

SPANGENBERGH: "We are very surprised to find here email station because in the middle of nowhere we are even surprised to find telephone here."

NARRATION: The place people go to log on is the town's information service center in the Governor's office. Established with support from the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, it is a popular place. A regular phone call to Germany is a costly three to four dollars a minute, but an email is a flat rate of 40 cents to anywhere in the world. And computers can also be fun as local people discover. Waiting for his turn to use the email, fifty-seven-year-old Bagdai is a regular customer. Like most of the ten thousand people in Kharkhorin, Bagdai keeps a small herd. He has seven children, all of them working and studying in Ulaanbaatar. Calling the capital even though it is only forty cents a minute is beyond Bagdai's means and that of most Mongolians whose average monthly wage is thirty dollars.

BAGDAI: "Since email connections, we can easily and quickly get in touch with one another."

NARRATION: Getting connected in Mongolia is a challenge. One solution is to leapfrog traditional infrastructure by using digital technology. This offers the possibility of bringing information to a country half the size of India. Douglas Gardener is former UNDP Resident Coordinator in Mongolia.

GARDEN: “This is one of the potential tools for handling one of Mongolia’s greatest obstacles to development, which is the flow of information across tremendous distances.”

NARRATION: As Mongolia moves from a socialist state to a free market economy, one of the national priorities is to create new job opportunities for the country’s young population, half of them under the age of twenty- one. With a high literacy rate of ninety-six percent, providing access to information, especially in rural areas, is pivotal if the economy is to grow. The email service is the best thing that has happened in centuries to this once glorious town. Like their famous ancestor, people in Kharkhorin can now roam the world, not on horseback, but on a cyber steed.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Segond that is quite a success story we have just seen. What is happening in Africa that might – is there anything happening in Africa that might be comparable to that?

SEGOND: Oh yes, you can see success stories in the different parts of the world. In Africa I have seen a success story like this one in Timbuktu, it is more or less the same story. They opened a tele-center and through the tele-center you can make a reservation for a hotel, you can develop e-commerce, e-business, you will have better health services, and so on, and the development in Timbuktu is slow but of course at a better speed than before.

LYNCH: This is the perfect example, I mean this is a wonderful story and they show you about this sort of innate, you know, goodness of having this sort of technology at your finger tips. But the thing I don’t understand is -- I can understand that this is a worthwhile project to focus one’s attention and resources on, but you know this project has such – it just is so complex, it almost has like a kind of revolutionary approach that you guys are taking to try and deal with every element, directly or indirectly, related with whatever information society means. I am not sure I quite understand what it means, but I mean it shows how the technology works, but why do you need to regulate it, why do you need to create rapid, you know – in the draft action plan -- a rapid reaction force to deal with security violations, you know schemes for taxation, for international taxation or transfers? There is all this other stuff that

deals with privacy issues. It just seems that a good idea is made so complicated that it makes one feel that it is really about something else – it's beyond just putting computers in the hands of individuals.

SEGOND: No, I don't think there is something beyond that. I told you that the main goal of the summit is to use ICT for development. But it is true that it is not the only and alone goal. You have different goals too. It is clear that -- for example, in the developed world you have a strong preoccupation about cyber security, that means child pornography, that means national security interest, that means fight against terrorism and so on, and in the United States you have a perfect example, all the measures taken after 9/11. So on the international agenda, in the developed world, you have not only the problem of ICT for development that we have discussed, you have also some other problems. And the question of cyber security comes among the four or five subjects that the developed countries would like to discuss.

JENKINS: I guess that the thing that make everybody worried is, as soon as you start discussing these topics, it opens the door to those who would wish to regulate. And of course it is perhaps no coincidence that the 80% of the world that doesn't have access to the internet at the moment, the majority of them live in countries without open societies, and their governments are governments that would very much wish to control the free flow of information. And one thinks of China, for example, with the largest population on the planet, which very carefully restricts access to the internet and tries to filter the information that people can get their hands on. I have another concern, which is an extension of that, which is I notice in your briefing notes for this summit, you talk about how there is growing concern about the possible expansion of one single global culture, and therefore there needs to be regulations put in place, or rather should I say you say that culture should not be considered in the same way as I think you mentioned the rules of free exchange for food and services. The implication being of course that governments should be given the tools, should be given the power, to regulate what people can have access to in terms of the general culture, which is a step – it is even worst than what Colum was talking about -- in terms of freedom of the press. In other words, I guess what you are saying is because the French want to insure that they can continue to have a movie industry, they should be allowed to continue to regulate films that come from Hollywood, for example. And that is an infringement on basic freedoms and allowing people to decide what they want to see, read, listen to. How do you deal with that one? What is the approach?

SEGOND: You are right when you say that I think the majority of people and governments are worried at the perspective of the possible expansion of one single standardized global culture, and you have a lot of people, in a lot of countries, I don't know if it is a majority, who are attached to the notion of cultural diversity, which is something that is rich, it is not a poor notion, it is a rich notion, and also diversity of contents. I can illustrate that by statistics. Five years ago, common knowledge said that information society was speaking English. That was true. Eighty-seven percent of the web pages were written in English. Today, five years later, only 49% of web pages are written in English. So the proportion of English is declining. And that is a sort of realization that you have other languages in the world than just English.

JENKINS: But, it has happened without regulation, it has happened without a global conference.

SEGOND: Yes, but there I told you a fact. It is not a personal opinion. It is a fact.

JENKINS: Right.

SEGOND: There is a majority of people and states that believe that we have to preserve cultural diversity that is in the general interest of the world and of the humanity. And that is true -- that you have probably a majority of governments, who do not agree with the fact that cultural products or audio-visual works should be treated with the same general rules as goods and services. That is why you have in different parts of the world some regulatory mechanisms in order to protect cultural diversity without losing the interest of internationalism. But that is a fact that there is a – and it is a growing number of ...

JENKINS: It may be a fact that there is governments that are concerned. That doesn't necessarily mean that one has to kowtow to those concerns. One could turn to those governments and say, if you are concerned about it, then invest some money in your movie industry and make movies that people in your country want to see and maybe they won't want to buy the schlock for which, and a lot of it is schlock, that comes from Hollywood.

SEGOND: Well you see that is a real problem. You ask me about Africa. I remember to have traveled into Africa, and in one little African village they managed to get the TV. And they were using TV for two things, to look at the football and to look at Beverly Hills. That was far away from their reality, you know, to see little children, Californian children, going to school into a pink car with a driver. An African cannot dream to realize that in his lifetime. So, I don't really see the purpose to use the TV in order to produce this type of dreams or envy.

It would be much better to use it for educational purposes, or for cultural purposes. But that is a long debate between private enterprise or public service. And all these questions will be discussed at the summit. There is a special World Electronic Media Forum organized, where all these questions will be discussed by editors, publishers, practitioners from the developing world as [well as from] the developed world, and that is one of the five main events around the summit.

JENKINS: Are you not concerned...?

LITTLEJOHNS: We are out of time. Mr. Segond, thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Guy-Olivier Segond, Special Ambassador for the UN's upcoming World Summit on the Information Society. He was interviewed by Tony Jenkins of Portugal's Expresso, and Colum Lynch of The Washington Post. I am Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on this screen:

World Chronicle
United Nations, Room S-827
New York, N.Y., 10017.
Or by email at: bouima@un.org

This programme is a Public Affairs Presentation from United Nations Television.

The views and opinions expressed on this programme are those of the participants, and do not necessarily reflect the official statements or views of the United Nations.