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Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at a Meeting devoted to Information and Communication
Technologies for Development

Summary of the President of the General Assembly at the concluding plenary meeting

Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates and friends,

On behalf of the General Assembly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of you who participated in this two-day meeting of the General Assembly devoted to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for Development. The participation of the President of Senegal, the Secretary-General, the President of Economic and Social Council, the Chairmen of the UN ICT Task Force and the G-8 DOT Force, the Secretary-General of ITU and a large number of Ministers as well as the high number of speakers at the four plenary meetings clearly showed the importance you are attaching to this topic. I am also grateful to the panelists, key-note speakers and lead discussants, many of them coming from the private sector and non-profit organizations, for sharing their views with us during the two informal panels. Let me take a few moments to highlight the major issues of our discussions by way of concluding remarks. Please note that I will not provide details on the two informal panels, as we have just been briefed on their outcome. The meeting was briefed on the work accomplished by the UN ICT Task Force and the G-8 DOT Force in preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society.

Our meeting, which aimed at fostering digital opportunities for all in the emerging information society, was recognized as an important and timely initiative, especially in light of a persistent digital divide between developed and developing countries, as well as within countries.

The ICT revolution is opening new opportunities for economic growth and social development. A wide consensus has emerged on the potential of ICT to promote sustainable growth; to combat poverty eradication; to strengthen democratic governance; to contribute to the empowerment of women in reducing gender inequalities; to promote the active participation of disabled and elderly persons in socio-economic development; to bridge the distance between rural and urban populations; and to significantly strengthen the global fight against diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. In short, ICT is a strategic instrument for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. However, ICT for development is still under-used in many parts of the world. The digital divide threatens to further marginalize the economies and peoples of many developing countries

as well as countries with economies in transition. The challenge of transforming this digital divide into digital opportunities requires international commitment and cooperation.

The United Nations and other international organizations are recognized as a catalyst to fostering digital opportunities and putting ICT at the service of development. The adoption of the Ministerial Declaration of the high-level segment of ECOSOC of 2000, which was subsequently endorsed by the Millennium Summit, provides the framework for the efforts of the United Nations in that regard. The General Assembly, the most universal and representative body of the United Nations System, is recognized as a forum for evolving a meaningful, action-oriented and coordinated response by the international community to bridge the digital divide and thus helping to achieve the development goals of the Millennium Declaration. The meeting also welcomed the establishment of the United Nations ICT Task Force, which is becoming a key forum on how ICT can help achieve the Millennium Development Goals and in promoting policy coherence and coordination amongst international initiatives. The valuable contributions made by the G-8 DOT Force in raising awareness, linking networks and promoting multi-stakeholder initiatives were also emphasized.

The meeting recognized the significance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for leveraging development with the use of ICT. Many delegates emphasized the importance of collaborative partnerships between governments, civil society and the private sector in order to ensure that the benefits of ICT become available to all. The private sector has a key role in developing and disseminating ICTs. Governments are responsible for providing transparent regulatory and legal frameworks that integrate the specific needs of developing countries.

Civil society can bring a broader, participatory and inclusive approach to ICT development. And all stakeholders, as the
Secretary-General stressed in his important intervention yesterday, should nurture their multi-stakeholder initiatives to ensure their effectiveness and long-term sustainability, including by providing adequate resources.

Developing countries are well aware of the ICT needs for the national development but require support from the international community to fulfil these needs. We must provide adequate resources to realize the digital opportunity for developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The cooperation between developed and developing countries is thus one crucial element for bridging the digital divide, but the potential of collaboration among developing countries (south-south cooperation) should also be fully explored. At the same time, regional collaborative efforts should be recognized and promoted. For example, the President of Senegal, shared with us in his keynote speech yesterday, the challenges faced by the New Partnership for Africa's Development NEPAD in achieving economic and social development objectives. ICT has been recognized as one of the main priorities of NEPAD. These regional initiatives need full international support.

It was stressed that our deliberations will also make a significant contribution to the forthcoming World Summit on the

Information Society. The Summit will be a major opportunity to discuss measures to be taken for bridging the digital divide and to use the full potential of ICT to reach the Millennium Goals.

In concluding, I must express my satisfaction with the most substantive discussions we had over the last two days. We have stressed the importance of ICT for development and reaffirmed our commitment of mainstreaming ICT in development issues. The realization of the potential of ICT for development requires a broad international commitment of political leaders to act in concert. It is up to us to bridge the digital divide and turn it into a digital opportunity. I look forward to our continued cooperation in bridging the digital divide.

Thank you.