

**STATEMENT BY PROF. (MRS) KRISHNA BOSE, MEMBER OF
PARLIAMENT ON AGENDA ITEM 32: INFORMATION AND
COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT AT THE
PLENARY OF THE 57TH UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 8,
2002**

Mr. President,

The agenda item, "Information and Communication Technologies for Development" is of great importance for developing countries as they are keen to benefit from Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in their struggle to eradicate poverty and to achieve sustained economic growth.

2. ICT, the new paradigm of the 21st century, has the potential of creating new approaches for development, particularly through the possibility of "leap frogging" stages of technological development. At the Millennium Summit, our Heads of Government and State recognised the tremendous opportunities offered by ICT and agreed to work together to ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially ICT, are available to all. Bridging the digital divide – the uneven diffusion of ICT - between and within nations is now a global objective. Given the pace of the revolutionary changes in the field of ICT, the divide widens every day, demonstrating the imperative for concerted action by the international community as a matter of the utmost urgency. At the same time, it is important to reach a consensus, which unfortunately we have not yet reached, 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.

3. The United Nations has a crucial role to play in making ICT work for the promotion of the developmental efforts of developing countries. The holding of the Special meeting of the General Assembly this June was significant in promoting awareness. The UN system now needs to work on concrete programmes that provide technical and financial support for capacity building to developing countries. The ICT Task Force, we are confident, will contribute to this process.

4. The World Summit on Information Society to be held in two phases - in 2003 in Switzerland and in 2005 in Tunisia - should focus on how to achieve the objective of ICT for all. We hope that the meeting will build a consensus at the global level on how to increase access to ICT, use ICT for development and

secure a commitment at the political level to act in concert, on the basis of mutual benefit. We believe that the involvement of major groups and relevant stakeholders will contribute greatly to our efforts to achieve the goal of ICT for All.

Mr. President,

5. We have, in India, 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 even in the most remote parts of the country. In its strategy towards this end, India will focus on developing the necessary IT infrastructure and enhancing human capacities. We expect, in the next five years, to have 200-300 million telephone users and 300-400 million Internet users. This would require large investment in the areas of, inter-alia, optical fiber cables, Internet Service Providers, Internet Data Centres and mobile telephony. We have undertaken initiatives towards this end and are working with stakeholders and the private sector to make access to IT affordable and user friendly.

6. Some specific measures being pursued in India are 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. We are also committed to e-governance which brings people and government even closer to each other. The first step we took was the posting by all Government departments of information on their activities on the World Wide Web. The second was to move to a stage of interaction where inputs are sought from our people on government programmes and initiatives with a view to their further improvement. The third stage, which is now under implementation, is to allow for transactions between the government and the people to be made electronically.

7. We also believe that e-commerce is another area that has tremendous scope. IT has broken geographical barriers. This opens up opportunities for small and medium scale enterprises to extend their geographical reach and secure new customers in ways formerly restricted to much larger firms. We would, however, have to address the challenges of providing a sound legal basis to these transactions. We must also address issues of security.

8. The IT industry is income generating and can contribute to economic growth of a country. The gross annual revenue of the IT software and services industry in India during the fiscal year 2000-2001 was over US\$ 8.2 billion. Exports contributed US\$ 6.2 billion to this figure, an increase of 55% in dollar terms over the previous year. The Indian software industry currently accounts for 2% of our GDP. This figure is projected to increase to 7.7% by 2008. Its

contribution to exports is presently 14% and is projected to increase to 35% by 2008. The performance of the Indian industry derives from its quality and its delivery of high-end requirements. A survey of giant TNCs reveals that one out of every four outsources its critical software requirements from India. India also has the predominant share of companies which have received the SEI CMM Level 5 certification of industry recognition for the highest standards of quality in software development.

Mr. President,

9. We subscribe to the view that it is necessary to develop human resources through education, including secondary and tertiary education, in order to benefit from ICT. The social benefits of primary education are widely acknowledged and it is, therefore, a worldwide goal. In today's technological world, secondary and tertiary education have become important. Similarly, the role of vocational training centres or IT institutions that provide the specific skills demanded by the market is pivotal. It is the development of such skills and capabilities which attracts private investment, including foreign direct investment, and, in turn, contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction. The growth of the IT industry in India owes itself to a large extent to the availability of a large pool of skilled manpower. Our IT training industry has gross annual revenues of US\$ 400 million and an annual growth rate of about 40%. We, therefore, again strongly commend efforts by the UN System, particularly the Funds and Programmes, in providing technical assistance and capacity building.

Mr. President,

10. We recognise the important role which can be played by ICT in promoting development. Our own experience attests to this. We, however, also subscribe to the view that ICT by itself cannot solve the problems of poverty and under-development. It is also our view that a judicious blend of emphasis on provision of basic social, education and health services as well as on the development of both brick and click industries is required in any strategy for sustained human development and poverty reduction.