

**SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS**  
**STATEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS**  
**CONFEDERATION**

**SPEECH GIVEN BY MR SAMUEL SCHMID**  
**16 NOVEMBER 2005**

President,  
Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Secretary General of the Summit,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to thank Tunisia and the Tunisian authorities for preparing and holding this World Summit on the Information Society here in Tunis.

Two years ago it was my country, Switzerland, which had the pleasure and the privilege of hosting the first phase of this Summit in Geneva. At the time, we were still not certain that these four letters, WSIS, would really succeed in launching a dialogue at the global level. Today, even the most sceptical recognise that this Summit provides the ideal platform for the worldwide dialogue on information and the information technologies, the importance of which is no longer in doubt.

I would also like to thank the International Telecommunication Union for taking the initiative in organising this Summit.

In Geneva, we adopted the legal and political basis for a project by agreeing on a Declaration of Principles and an Action Plan. Here in Tunis, it is a matter of entering the implementation phase, in other words of determining who will do what in order to ensure that the information and communication technologies are applied with a view to making the world a fairer and safer place. This implementation phase which we shall be discussing here in Tunis therefore constitutes an essential phase of the WSIS.

The twenty-first century is the century of information. The internet, SMS messaging, the fact that anyone can be reached anywhere and at any time: these are phenomena which have completely revolutionised professional and private life. The technologies in question have multiple possibilities of establishing a better world: for example, in combating poverty, in ensuring better access to medical care, in strengthening the economy and stimulating trade, in promoting democracy and guaranteeing cultural diversity, and even in furthering understanding among peoples. Seen from this angle, the results of this Summit, notably those which will be achieved here in Tunis during the second phase, are also of capital importance with a view to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

However, we must not forget that, if they are used unwisely, these technologies may result in the exact opposite of what we expect from them. They may be harmful to society, by increasing the divide between rich and poor. They may lead to States keeping watch on their citizens without respecting their private lives or their democratic rights. Finally, they may lead to excesses, by bringing within everyone's reach pages of a racist nature, or featuring child pornography.

President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is up to us, it is up to you, to carve out the political and legal framework which will prevent these abuses and which will enable the information and communication technologies, with the immense opportunities they represent, to be instruments at the service of a better world.

In my capacity as President of one of the oldest democracies in the world, I want this summit not only to concentrate on the technologies but also to take up the questions of content and access to this content. Allow me to recall briefly a number of facts regarding individual access to information. A very large proportion of the inhabitants of our planet do not have access to means of communication due to insufficient infrastructure or financial resources. Half the world's population do not have a telephone – let alone internet access. A quarter have never made a telephone call. Today, these hundreds of millions of individuals, men, women and children, are still excluded from the information society. This is why one of the major goals of this Summit will be to further the financing of the establishment of an infrastructure and telecommunications services in the poorest regions of the planet. Thus we must take measures to enable the inhabitants of the developing countries to use these technologies with a view to improving their living conditions: this involves not only financing infrastructures but also educating the people concerned and creating concrete content which is appropriate to their needs. Until this has been put in place, the information and communication technologies will remain a tool of the rich, and the divide between rich and poor will continue to grow.

Of the many individuals who still do not have access to information resources, for many this is due to political reasons. It is not acceptable — and I say this without beating about the bush — for the United Nations Organisation to continue to include among its members those States which imprison citizens for the sole reason that they have criticised their government or their authorities on the internet or in the press. Any knowledge society respects the independence of its media as it respects human rights. I therefore expect that freedom of expression and freedom of information will constitute central themes over the course of this Summit. For myself, it goes without question that here in Tunis, within its walls and without, anyone can discuss quite freely. For us, it is one of the conditions *sine qua non* for the success of this international conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want this second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society to be a success and would like it to produce some very concrete results which will enable the inhabitants of our planet to have access to information and thereby solve a large number of their problems. Is it not our goal, the goal of all of us, to act to ensure that the information society becomes the knowledge society?

President, thank you