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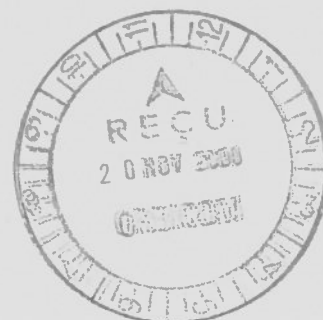
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NGO Section
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Two United Nations Plaza, Room DC1-1477
New York, NY 10017, USA

Friday, 17 November, 2000

Dear Representative,

I am pleased to inform you that as a follow up to the High-level Segment of ECOSOC on the theme of information and communication technologies (ICT) and development held on 5-7 July 2000 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the Council decided to call for an ICT Task Force and a Trust Fund to be created early next year to tap the global energy and information flows unleashed by the digital revolution for development. The principle of public-private partnerships would be at the heart of this initiative.

The Task Force will work with established ICT programmes as well as new efforts, such as the dot-force of the Group of 8. Its overall mandate is to galvanize useful synergies, not to establish a new bureaucracy or attempt to duplicate or compete with other programmes. What the United Nations brings to the table that no other organization or entity can is its universality and the trust it engenders in the less developed countries of the world.

We would very much wish to benefit from your views in formulating a strategy for the United Nations ICT Task Force and Trust Fund. Please visit our web site at www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc/itforum/ICT.htm
You are welcome to e-mail us at esa@un.org or write to us at United Nations, 1 UN Plaza, Room DC1-1428 New York, NY 10017, USA your comments by 15 December.

I attach, for your information, the relevant background documentation, including a discussion paper prepared by the United Nations secretariat and a questionnaire.

We look forward to learn about your views on the United Nations ICT Task Force and a Trust Fund.

Yours sincerely,


Hamla MEZOUJ
Chief, NGO Section DESA

All ECOSOC NGOs



United Nations
Information
and
Communication
Technologies
Task Force

Media Advisory

José María Figueres, former President of Costa Rica, appointed as UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on ICT

(New York, 13 November) The appointment by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the former President of Costa Rica to head the UN Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Advisory Group was announced today in New York.

President José María Figueres — a leader acclaimed for advancing the use of digital technology for development of his country — will lead a team of experts drawn from the private and public sectors and countries of the North as well as the South. The Advisory Group is charged by the Secretary-General with drawing up the specific modalities for a United Nations ICT Task Force on the basis of guidelines set by Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July. The Task Force will serve as a catalyst for bringing together international agencies, governments and private businesses and foundations in harnessing the potential of ICT for development for all.

The Advisory Group is comprised of a Who's Who of pioneers in advancing information technology and promoting its uses for economic and social development. Within its ranks are Vinton Cerf, widely regarded as the founder of the Internet; sociologist Manuel Castells, a top analyst of the social implications of the ICT revolution; Jiang Mian-heng, Vice-President of the Academy of Science, China; and Muhammed Yunus who, as CEO of the Grameen Bank, is bringing cell phone technology to farmers and villagers in rural Asia. Among the advisers drawn from the public sector are Jay Naidoo, former Minister of Communications of South Africa, and Estonian Foreign Minister Toomas Ilves, who both have been instrumental in making their countries regional leaders in ICT and e-commerce. Indonesian Ambassador to the United Nations Makarim Wibisono placed ICT issues prominently on the UN agenda earlier this year, in his capacity as President of the UN ECOSOC. The private sector is represented by, among others, Cisco Systems CEO John Chambers, Pacific Century Group CEO Richard Li (China), Nokia CEO Jorma Ollila, Hewlett Packard CEO Carleton Fiorina and Sam Pitroda, CEO of WorldTel (India). (See complete listing on the other side.)

The Advisory Group will advise the Secretary-General in carrying out consultations with Governments, the private sector, foundations and multilateral development institutions on building a strategic partnership with the private sector to bridge the global digital divide. To this end, President Figueres is asking Advisory Group members for recommendations as to the structure and necessary support mechanisms of the ICT Task Force.

The Task Force will be the response to the call for action in bridging the digital divide prominently featured in UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Millennium Report. The idea for an ICT Task Force and Trust Fund originated with a high-level panel of ICT experts, convened in New York in April 2000 at the request of the UN General Assembly and chaired by José María Figueres. The proposal was endorsed by a Ministerial Declaration at the 7 July meeting of ECOSOC, and was promoted further in a meeting of five Heads of State of the ECOSOC Bureau with the UN Secretary-General on 8 September, in the context of the UN Millennium Summit.

The appointment of President Figueres will be announced by UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Nitin Desai at a New York press briefing, Monday 13 November at 11:00 a.m. in Room S-226 of UN Headquarters. President Figueres will speak to the press at this time via a video hook-up from Geneva and will answer questions from media representatives.

For more information contact Tim Wall, 212-963-5851; <wallt@un.org> or Yasmin Padamsee, 212-963-7704, padamsec@un.org, of the UN Department of Public Information.

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12 October 2000
(revised 27 October 2000)

DISCUSSION DRAFT

**A framework for consultations on the
United Nations ICT Task Force**

1. In addressing the issue of the global digital divide the United Nations has a number of key comparative advantages, foremost of which are the Organization's unique global political acceptance and legitimacy, in particular in the developing world, but also its long-standing experience in and comprehensive contribution to framing global standards and rules to facilitate international business (ITU, WIPO, UNDP), and its widespread field presence. As a result, the United Nations is uniquely positioned to be an effective intermediary between such important stakeholders as the global private sector and national governments, particularly of developing countries.
2. A high-level panel of experts on information technology met in April 2000 and called upon the United Nations to play a leadership and catalytic role in helping to bridge the digital divide and accelerate development by harnessing the development potential of information and communication technologies (ICT). To this end, the panel recommended bringing together key stakeholders in an international Task Force and a Trust Fund that it would administer. These arrangements would function outside the normal structures of the United Nations.
3. The United Nations Economic and Social Council in a Ministerial Declaration adopted in July 2000 recognized the key role of partnerships, involving national governments, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in putting ICT in the service of development. The Council adopted a resolution (E/2000/29) outlining some elements of the proposed Task Force such as its mandate, composition and secretariat arrangements.
4. The Secretary General was requested to undertake consultations with all stakeholders and Member States "regarding the composition, governance structure, mandate, terms of reference, secretarial support and project implementation arrangements" of the Task Force. The resultant proposals of the Secretary General are to be communicated to a resumed session of ECOSOC (late January – early February 2001) for approval and for subsequent implementation and establishment of the Task Force.
5. The mission of the Task Force, as outlined in the documents mentioned above, would be to (a) provide overall leadership in helping to formulate strategies for ICT development and putting them at the service of development for all; (b) to forge a strategic partnership between the United Nations system, private industry and financing trusts and foundations, donors, programme countries and other relevant stakeholders, and (c) to mobilize new resources for ICT-for-development activities and projects. The Task Force will also administer a Trust Fund to be established and funded on the basis of voluntary contributions by interested

partners. Broad outlines of activities at the national and international levels and by the United Nations system that may be promoted and financed by the Task Force were contained in paragraphs 14-17 of the ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration.

6. One of the guiding principles in developing the terms of reference and the modalities of operation of the Task Force is the necessity to ensure complementarity and synergy of its activities with those of other international initiatives in this field, in particular the "dot.force" that was launched by the G8 and is currently being set up with the World Bank and UNDP acting as its secretariat. With this in view, the United Nations is working closely at the present organizational stage with the World Bank and UNDP, which are expected to fully participate in the Task Force when it is set up. The other key agencies of the United Nations system to participate in the Task Force would be UNESCO, ITU, WIPO, ILO and UNCTAD.
7. The objectives of consultations with stakeholders and Member States are threefold:
 - To solicit comments on the proposed **organizational elements** of the Task Force and its Trust Fund (terms of reference, composition, governance and oversight procedures and mechanisms, modalities of operation, etc.) with a view to identifying elements that would be most conducive to stakeholders' active involvement and support.
 - To solicit views as to the **priority areas of action and the types of activities and projects** that the Task Force could be most effective and efficient in promoting and financing and that could elicit active interest of potential participants.
 - On the basis of the interlocutor's views on the above two items, to preliminarily discuss their **possible resource contribution**, financial and/or otherwise (with potential donors), or other forms of support for the Task Force's aims and activities (with recipients).
8. Elements of the initial proposals as to the organization and activities of the Task Force are contained in the annexes to this discussion draft.
9. Consultations with a limited number of key actors will be conducted by the team of high-level advisers in October-November of 2000. These advisers will be expected to meet in the later part of December 2000 – early January 2001 to present their findings and recommendations. Other relevant stakeholders, including all Member States not directly consulted by the advisers, will be sent a questionnaire.
10. The following **stages of the process of establishing** the Task Force and the Trust Fund are currently anticipated:
 - Establishment of group of senior advisors (October 2000)
 - Consultation process (October through December)
 - Presentation of the report to the Secretary General (January 2001)
 - Establishment of the Task Force (late January- early February)
 - Formation of the Trust Fund (July).
11. The **goals** of the consultation process are the following:
 - To present the mission and general program framework for the Task Force and the Trust Fund;

- To clarify ways that the Task Force and the Trust Fund could complement and achieve synergies with other relevant initiatives;
 - To identify the conditions and interests that may encourage donors from public and private sectors to contribute to the activities of the Task Force and the Trust Fund;
 - To develop the design of the Trust Fund: its governance structure, the proactive/vs. receptive nature of its relationship to grantees, its role in market-building, its outreach to various sectors, its liaison with other initiatives within and without the intergovernmental system.
12. The final report of the team of advisers to the Secretary General, to be prepared on the basis of consultations and responses to the questionnaire, should contain an analysis of factors, conditions and modalities to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of the task force's operation that would have been identified in the process of consultations, as well as the resultant concrete proposals for the Secretary General's consideration and subsequent submission to ECOSOC.