



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

STATEMENT BY

Her Excellency Ms. M. Patricia Durrant
Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations

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Mr. President

Bridging the Digital Divide means that our populations will be able to exploit the information and communications technologies for social and productive advantage. We know that information, linked to knowledge and communication technologies can enable us all to plan, make decisions and innovate, and implement new activities in areas including education, government services, medicine, business, and essential services such as disaster mitigation.

My delegation suggests that this meeting focus particularly on policies for enabling citizens to access information generally needed by the public. This must be done by ensuring :

- that there are digital networks in each country or region;
- that there is access to the Internet as a means of distributing and sharing information;
- that the bandwidth used is adequate, and
- that there are local telecentres where the public can access the Internet and the information needed.

Access by the citizenry is dependent on diffusion of the technology and services to individuals and households, to educational institutions, and to other public institutions such as libraries and community centers.

Effective delivery of information services also requires that citizens are aware of a single point of entry to information held by their governments and related agencies. This portal or gateway would therefore serve as a guide to the related agencies, and would enable access to a variety of sources.

While advances have been made, in many developing countries to increase public access to information via ICTs, there is still the need for extending the pilot projects to the wider population. ICTs require appropriate infrastructure, human, technical and material resources, and facilities to ensure public access to the Internet at convenient locations.

Community telecentres in libraries, in non-governmental organizations, and in community centres matched with extended digital networking infrastructure are therefore needed.

How then does the citizenry participate in this process of accessing and using information? They are involved in registering their civil status, educating themselves and their families, sustaining their farming and other production, and introducing innovative practices. The connectivity afforded by information technology can enable citizens to carry out these functions more effectively and to use information to protect themselves against disasters, particularly natural disasters.

Governments now have the opportunity to begin to use ICTs in the provision of basic social services including education and health, and to begin to implement electronic government by providing services online to citizens. Advantages include enabling citizens to have decentralized access to information and services. A person away from the capital should be able to access forms, submit applications, and obtain need data for decision making or for further action.

Reliable low cost access influences the degree to which ICTs can be used by the population. In this regard many governments have introduced regulatory initiatives to enhance network competition.

Jamaica, a small island developing state, is very conscious of the major role of information in national development. Our Government has very recently passed the

Access to Information Act 2002, which is intended "to reinforce and give further effect to certain fundamental principles underlying the system of constitutional democracy, namely:

- governmental accountability;
- transparency; and
- public participation in decision-making."

We recognize that to fully implement this Act, Jamaica will need to :

- expand the applications of electronic government;
- enable development of related policies, human and technical resources and infrastructure,
- exploit information and communication technologies to enable citizens to have full access to official information.

Implementation of this Act, and other development initiatives, are greatly facilitated by the strategic use of information and communications technologies at national and regional levels.

Within the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, (CSME) the Council on Trade and Economic Development (COTED) provides an intergovernmental network for the harmonization of these policies and for implementation on a regional basis.

In Jamaica, liberalization, which we expect to be the driver of competition and expanded value added services, has already been implemented through our Telecommunications Act of 2000. The Office of Utility Regulation is engaged in an innovative process of ensuring that competition is implemented on a level playing field. We have begun to see the benefits in expanded access to cellular phone services and expect that in a few years to achieve widespread access in rural areas.

We have begun a number of initiatives to facilitate public access to information via the Internet. This access is being provided via public telecentres located in post offices, public libraries, and community centers. We are still at the stage of pilot projects sponsored by the Government of Jamaica, the United Nations Development Programme, and the University of the West Indies, and implemented by centres which participate in the Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SDNP), Jamaica.

Jamaica was pleased to host recent regional meetings on e-government, organized with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Government of Italy, and CARICAD; and on the use of information technology in disaster management organized with the UNDP. It is important that the results of meetings such as these be speedily implemented at national and regional levels.

My delegation encourages this meeting to agree on defining policies which will support the bridging of the Digital Divide, and the increased capability of our citizens to exploit technologies for development of our communities. As many countries still need to develop basic infrastructure, we emphasize that this must be done through public/private partnerships.

We must not see ICTs as isolated instruments, but rather as key elements in accelerating growth, raising competitiveness, promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty, and facilitating the effective integration of all countries into the global economy.

We look forward to these issues being addressed in the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and in the process leading up to next year's World Summit on the Information Society.

Thank you.