

Presentation by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Suriname, Rinaldo Ronald Venetiaan, on the occasion of the Meeting of the Presidents of South America

Your Excellencies Heads of State of the South American continent, Honorable Ministers, President of the Inter-American Development Bank, and President of the Andean Development Corporation Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset I wish to express my appreciation to President Fernando Henrique Cardoso of the Federative Republic of Brazil for the invitation extended to me to participate in this historic meeting of the Presidents of South America. We may certainly regard this meeting as a first step in our quest for the expansion and deepening of mutual cooperation between the countries of the South American continent in the new millennium.

Mr. President,

The world around us is undergoing an unprecedented revolution in information and communication technologies which already has resulted in the creation of the new global economy, with a direct impact on the economic and social situation of all nations of the world, including the countries we are representing at this Summit.

It is widely recognized, that the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) play an important role in the dissemination of the huge amount of knowledge which is available today and which can be made operational in the promotion of economic growth and sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and the mutual integration of our countries, as well as in the facilitation of their beneficial integration into the global economy.

That is why we may in no way let ourselves be lured into rejecting modern developments which indeed for many of us - in particular for the poor countries and for the poor in our countries - constitute threats, such as the deepening and widening of the gap between rich and poor, the dissemination of adverse influences and perceptions regarding life-, and the fierce competition our local businesses experience from gigantic enterprises which can operate via e-commerce.

On the contrary, it is necessary to launch a national initiative in every one of our countries to develop the opportunity for our peoples to catch the "Internet Express" without further delay, and so promote access to information and communication services at all levels of education and in all areas of public domain.

Mr. President,

The primary responsibility for our countries' timely and effective entry into the information age rests with our national governments, private sector institutions and civil society, but regional cooperation and assistance are of crucial importance in support of the national ICT development projects of developing countries.

Mr. President,

Another important issue concerning ICT development involves the need for robust investments in telecommunications networks, which allow the integration of computing with modern communication technologies.

Many of us are in danger of becoming caught in a vicious circle, because we lack the necessary financial resources to meet the need for new ICT investments, and so risk not just being marginalized but becoming "outsiders" in the emerging information-based global economy.

Our most immediate challenge must be to pull the poor countries and the poor people in our region out of this vicious circle of enduring poverty.

Furthermore, we must strengthen our education system to secure continuing ICT education and training for our youth and for other sectors of civil society, as well as to ensure unrestricted access to ICT services.

Within the context of our collective aim to broaden mutual trade in goods and services, due consideration should be given to the role of e-commerce and the need for an appropriate regulating framework to guide intraregional trade.

Consideration should also be given to issues, such as the security of on line transactions, computer crimes, the protection of intellectual property rights, the feasibility of restrictions on Internet traffic containing material that could be considered as offensive or immoral for children.

Mr. President,

Let us commit ourselves in the Brasilia Declaration of this Summit to strengthen our national and regional efforts and to make available the necessary resources in order to let the 323 million people of South America benefit from the potential of ICT to enhance the development process and to facilitate the integration of our nations into the global economy.

The establishment of a South American Fund in support of our collective endeavor, as proposed by your country, is highly commendable.

In the meantime, Mr. President, let us not forget the needs of those people in our countries who have not even entered the era of electricity yet.

Our continent holds conditions which range from the very primitive to the most modern.

We must therefore not neglect the traditional strategies for development efforts.

Mr. President, in closing, I would like to express our deep appreciation for the invitation to my Government in the Andean Community's proposal for a political dialogue with MERCOSUR and Chili, Guyana and Suriname.

I thank you, Mr. President.