



**Address of Her Excellency, the First Lady
of the Dominican Republic
DR. MARGARITA CEDEÑO DE FERNÁNDEZ
Head of the Dominican Delegation to the World Summit on the
Information Society (WSIS)
Second Phase, Tunisia, Africa**

**In representation of
His Excellency Dr. Leonel Fernández
President of the Dominican Republic**

**High-Level Round Table on
“Putting ICTs to work for the United Nations Development Agenda,
including the Millennium Development Goals”
November 17, 2005**

Your Excellency, Mr. **Abdoulaye Wade**, President of the Republic of Senegal,

Honorable **José Antonio Ocampo**, United Nations Under-Secretary-General,

Honorable **Yoshio Utsumi**, Secretary General of the International
Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the World Summit on the Information
Society (WSIS)

Distinguished international panelists,

Participants

On behalf of my husband, His Excellency, the President of the Dominican Republic, Dr. Leonel Fernández, who would have liked to be here with us today, it is an honor to share with you some thoughts to stimulate productive discussions on how we can overcome the challenges that keep us from leveraging the ICTs on a large scale as tools for the United Nations Development Program, and turn the great challenge of the Digital Divide into a true Digital Opportunity that will allow us to develop a society that is socially inclusive, economically equitable, democratically egalitarian and with solidarity among the people.

I believe that today in Tunisia, after all we have achieved in the first phase of this Summit in Geneva and the recent World Summit in New York, we see the future full of hope because we know what we have to do throughout this decade ahead of us: prepare ambitious action plans to ensure compliance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and learn to use the ICTs as the leading mechanisms to achieve them.

In order to promote the ICTs as the engine of human and sustainable development, particularly through the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, we have to “localize” or “decentralize” the Goals to the rural and local levels, where extreme poverty plagues today’s societies.

My country, the Dominican Republic, is one of the seven pilot countries of the United Nations Millennium Project—the only middle-income nation that is

located outside of the African continent. We were the first to create a Presidential Commission for the Millennium Development Goals and we have concluded a Millennium Development Goals Needs Assessment for each MDG target, as well as a Costing Analysis of the goods, services and infrastructure necessary to comply with such—all thanks to the active interaction of the Government, civil society, the private sector and the United Nations Country Team, among others.

We know where we are, where we have to go and how to get there. But we also know that the Dominican Government cannot do it alone. The cost of achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the next ten years will be \$29.5 billion US Dollars and we have an annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of only approximately \$19 billion US Dollars.

This is why my husband, as President of the country, has called this to the attention of all sectors, especially, multilateral financial institutions and has done so in places like the United Nations, last September.

But I, particularly, understand that achieving the Goals requires an extensive “National Pact,” great efforts and commitment from all of us.

I am also convinced that the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals has to start in the core cell of society, the families.

That is why we must “actively engage the communities” hand in hand with technology—the driving force that can help us to achieve our objectives. This is the concept behind my program called “*Progresando*”, which is implemented by the Office of the First Lady of the Dominican Republic, in order to address the Millennium Development Goals at the local level while each “family makes progress.”

Progresando (Making Progress) is a rights-based program for socio-educational intervention aimed towards achieving integrated, sustainable and equitable human development. We build the skills, abilities, and capabilities of each citizen so they can be active in forging their own destinies and creators of their own development.

In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we started to work with the poorest households, those that are most vulnerable, single mothers, through integrated education, teaching them to exercise their rights as human beings but also to fulfill their duties as members of society. Parents have the obligation to register their children on time, provide them with a birth certificate, enroll them in school and send them to class every day, assist with their homework and keep their vaccines up to date.

We create awareness among sexually active adults on HIV-AIDS prevention and early pregnancy; and pregnant women are educated on the need to have

monthly check-ups, maintain a balanced diet and taking vitamins, folic acid, and minerals to prevent maternal-child mortality.

Now, as the Secretary of UNESCO has said, we must make the change from the Learning Society to the Information Society and more so, the Knowledge Society, which means nothing more than to effectively utilize the infinite amount of information that we have the opportunity to access today through the network of networks.

This basic information is just the platform on which we want to establish the foundations to achieve quality education and the necessary revenues to train productive and competent individuals whose skills allow them to be competitive in this global village, to use the term coined by our recently departed Peter Drucker, based on a knowledge-intensive economy, more than a capital-intensive one where ideas are the greatest source of revenues and drivers of sustainable development.

The ICTs play a significant role for developing countries, like ours, to implement the dual agenda, through the application of science, technology and innovation in relation to the economic growth of said countries and compliance with the Millennium Development Goals. That is why my husband and I have made ICTs a priority.

Our Offices are setting up Community Technology Centers (CTC), one in each municipality, starting with rural and marginal urban communities in extreme poverty.

The Community Technology Centers are true Think Tanks, based on a telecommunications infrastructure with access to broadband services, community broadcasts, digital libraries, and educational programs to give these communities that have traditionally been excluded from socio-economic development, who are natural victims of the Digital Divide, easy and low-cost access to ICTs, as tools for their education, training and development.

An example of this panel's subject, concerning the CTCs is the program we have titled "Prepárate para Competir" (Prepare to Compete,) through which we offer education and training that is integrated, not formal, to young people and adults, including literacy programs and programs to finish primary education, through an educational portal, with a tailored method of permanent and continuous education, according to their interests. The scope of this program includes secondary education with English modules and support for entrepreneurship type initiatives.

Additionally, the program includes digital data resources, interactive activities, links to global educational networks and facilities for on-line conferencing.

This way they are taught, not only to read and write, through content that includes skills needed to participate in society, but at the same time, they are becoming digitally literate, and the end-result is human beings that are better prepared to lead productive lives.

These efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the Dominican Republic are creating a paradigm shift, where impoverished citizens are becoming part of the solution. I firmly believe that my husband's commitment towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the dedication of his Government as a pilot country, coupled with the effort and desire of the communities to advance in the context of the new information society that we are building, can contribute to halving poverty, in its many dimensions, by the year 2015. This is key to achieving this.

Thank you.