

**Regional High-level Conference for Africa
Electronic Commerce Strategies for Development:
Promoting an International Dialogue**

Tunis, 19-21 June 2003

Tunis Declaration on Electronic Commerce for Development

We, the Ministers and representatives of African countries, responsible for the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and e-commerce, gathered in Tunis on June 21, 2003:

Recognizing that ICT, e-business and e-commerce are powerful tools to enhance productivity and efficiency in the production of goods and services, facilitate international trade and investment, promote gender equality and promote the integration of African countries into the world economic system, thus contributing to economic and social development in Africa, including its least developed countries, and thereby to some achievements of the UN Millennium Development Goals;

Aware of the need to support ICT infrastructure development in order to ensure better and affordable and greater access to Internet and to e-business and e-commerce tools, while taking into account cultural, social and economic diversities;

Recognizing the need for cooperation and dialogue between all concerned stakeholders at the regional and international levels on the issues of the digital economy in assisting the achievement of the economic and social development;

Recognizing that the need for universal access to ICT and its applications, including those related to governance, commerce and social issues, is common to all African countries, in particular the least developed countries and under-privileged social groups in the region;

Recognizing the important role of Governments and public institutions in the adoption of ICT policies and strategies to support quality public services to individuals, business and civil society;

Appreciating that despite the opportunities offered by ICT and especially Internet, and noting that while certain countries in Africa are benefiting from ICT in promoting their economic development, the majority of African countries are unable to get access and applying new technologies;

Recognizing that urgent action is needed to narrow the digital divide facing the African continent as a whole and in particular the gap in the availability and application of ICT both between and within African countries, and especially as regard the urban-rural context;

Acknowledging the importance of the partnership between government and the private sector in the development of ICT, e-business and e-commerce;

Recognizing that national ICT and e-commerce strategies should be based on the economic and social context of individual countries, taking into account international best practices and experiences to ensure harmonization and interoperability between local, regional and global ICT and e-commerce systems;

Acknowledging that ICT and e-commerce strategies need to address simultaneously all relevant factors such as public awareness and education, universal access to ICT, physical and legal infrastructure development, human resources development, as well as financial, security and privacy aspects;

Considering that cooperation and coordination, at the regional level and at the international level, is of utmost importance and necessity in ICT and e-commerce development and in need to establish an equitable

infrastructure, and appreciating the work undertaken by African regional organizations, in particular within the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD);

Appreciating the work being carried out by UNCTAD, UNECA, and other UN bodies, including the UN ICT Task Force, ITU, WIPO, ITC, UNDP, other international and regional organizations, as well as other initiatives such as the World Summit on Information Society in promoting the development and the use of ICT and e-commerce for economic and social development in accordance with the laws and regulations of signatory countries;

Considering that the World Summit on Information Society which will be held in two phases (Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005) will contribute to promote partnership and solidarity among all stakeholders in order to narrow the digital divide and enable a larger access and benefit from ICT; and

Considering the outcome of Bamako 2002, the first regional Conference preparatory to the WSIS, held in Mali in May 2002.

We hereby agree to:

1. Formulate and implement national and regional e-strategies and plans of action to develop ICT, e-commerce and e-business infrastructures and environment, and strive for universal access to ICT and its applications, including those related to e-business and e-commerce thus, (improving the competitiveness of African enterprises especially in global markets) contributing to economic and social development of African countries;
2. Support ICT development based on non-proprietary, open and neutral technology, including the use of open source software and open content knowledge systems and the development of local content;
3. Enhance participation in international activities, discussions and projects on e-commerce through, *inter alia*, pooling of resources, including financial and knowledge resources, and sharing experience on successful ICT use, in particular in rural ICT development;
4. Promote the integration of ICT and e-commerce strategies into national economic and social development plans with the broadest participation of all sectors particularly where African countries may have competitive advantage;
5. Contribute to efforts to develop internationally comparable statistical indicators for measuring and monitoring the progress of e-commerce development in African countries;
6. Provide the necessary services and enhance public awareness of ICT and e-commerce and increase human resource capacity through training and education; establish institutional services;
7. Encourage the participation of women and disadvantaged groups in the development of ICT-enabled business activities.
8. Adopt an enabling legislation that recognizes the validity and enforceability of electronic transactions in order to create a trustful environment for all the stakeholders;
9. Ensuring that the development of e-commerce is based on the economic and social context of each country taking into account the role of competition for national as well as cross-border e-commerce transactions;
10. Promoting the use of e-commerce by enterprises, especially SMEs, to enhance efficiency and build up their competitiveness by providing appropriate incentives and support;

11. Encouraging private-public partnership for the promotion of e-commerce activities in the African Continent;
12. Invite and encourage international support at multilateral, regional and bilateral levels to strengthen African efforts in ICT and e-commerce development through the implementation and expansion of technical, financial and material assistance aiming at helping African countries to overcome the new risks and challenges that ICT opportunities involved;
13. Work towards the adoption of a plan of action to improve access to information technology infrastructure, applications and knowledge, in the framework of the preparatory process and during both phases of the World Summit on Information Society;
14. Encourage cooperation, technology transfer and information flow, on all aspects of ICT and e-commerce among African countries and others;
15. Support the principle of triangular cooperation in the framework of the transfer of technology and know-how, encouraging, inter alia, mobilizing and structuring projects among countries in transition, emerging and developing countries with a view to establishing a platform for electronic exchange and transactions among enterprises so as to contribute to the reduction of the digital gap at the economic level;
16. Urge all countries, in particular developed countries to transfer technology to African countries;
17. Agree to continue the dialogue at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels to foster the development of ICT and e-commerce in Africa.

Tunis, 21 June 2003