INTERNATIONAL FORUM: LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN (LAC) IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:

Under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Ministry of Science and Technology of Brazil, and the United Nations Task Force for Information and Communication Technologies (UN ICT Task Force), the International Forum: Latin America and the Caribbean in the Information Society was held in Rio de Janeiro from 26 – 28 September.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the Forum was to promote exchange of ideas and open debate among representatives of the public and private sectors, academia, non-governmental organisations and international organisations within the framework of preparing an agenda for the region for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) that will take place in Geneva in December 2003. The Forum also had as one of its principal goals the preparation of inputs for the LAC Regional Preparatory Conference for the WSIS that will take place in Santo Domingo from 27-30 January 2003 under the auspices of the Government of the Dominican Republic, with the secretariat support of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The Forum's results and conclusions will be presented at the inter-governmental consultation on Information and Communication Technologies of the Inter-American Development Bank that will take place 11-12 November in Washington, D.C., as well as to upcoming meetings of non-governmental organizations and private sector concerns that will be held by the end of this year.

FORUM PARTICIPANTS:

Attending the Forum were 159 participants from 21 countries (see attached annex), who included the Ministers of Science and Technology of Brazil and Costa Rica and the Secretary of State and President of INDOTEL (Instituto Domicana de Telecomunicaciones) of the Dominican Republic. The head of Colombia’s Agenda Conectividad programme and the deputy head of the e-Mexico Programme also participated in the Forum.

ORGANISATION OF THE DEBATES:

The Forum's debates took place in both plenary sessions and sub-regional working groups. The inaugural session included the presentation of the major political framework of ITC development in the region and the policy orientations of the various organisations participating in the meeting. Following the opening session was an open debate in plenary in which leading technical experts and panellists put forward a regional vision
regarding the development of ICTs in LAC and the specific themes reflected in the conference's agenda. The second day of the Forum was dedicated to simultaneous meetings of the four sub-regional working groups, each of which undertook to formulate for their areas the principles and recommendations on the themes of regulation and infrastructure, contents and applications, open services and strategic aspects. The third, and final, day was given to the reading and approval of the reports of the sub-regional groups as well as to the adoption of the Forum’s overall recommendations and conclusions for the entire region.

RESUME OF THE DEBATES' RESULTS:

The executive summary below is a synthesis of the principal recommendations and conclusions of the four sub-regional working groups whose reports, taken together, will make a substantive contribution to the elaboration of the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action for Latin America and the Caribbean that will be adopted in its primary draft at the regional preparatory conference in Santo Domingo. All of the other meetings on ITC development that will take place in the LAC region will also contribute to the preparation of the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, while taking into consideration the framework of action and conclusions identified by the Rio Forum.

I. Principles:

1. The principal development objective of the Information Society must be the well-being of the individual and the community.

2. The Information Society must guarantee to everyone the fundamental right of access to information and to communication.

3. The widest participation of all the relevant actors in the process of development of the Information Society in the region must be assured, including the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) civil society and universities in order to create a common vision and implement proper policies.

4. The regulatory framework, the development of infrastructure, the provision of digital services and the production and utilisation of contents requires a regional approach and focus.

5. The LAC countries must pursue regional integration as a concerted action, in order to augment the region's potential for participation in the Global Information Society.

6. The Information Society for All must pay special attention to meeting the needs of isolated and rural communities and other marginalised groups and promote cultural and linguistic pluralism.
7. The sustainability of the Information Society must be based on economic growth, the reduction of poverty, the protection and growth of employment and socio-economic equity.

8. Basic and higher education form the basis for strengthening institutional capacities, stimulating innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit and the development of human capital.

9. The Information Society must promote the transfer and sharing of knowledge and technical "know how," in a manner that they are accessible to all countries and individuals.

10. The Information Society must promote efficiency, transparency and participation in public services, and the improvement of education, health and democratic participation.

II: Regulation and Infrastructure:

1. Increase citizen access to ICTs through the formulation of regulations and the creating of infrastructures that are transparent, reliable and non-discriminatory.

2. Focus programmes and policies towards meeting the needs of the least favoured and the disabled, as well as guarantee legal frameworks for the operating of community media and their access to isolated areas.

3. Include in regulatory mechanisms rules that facilitate public access points, strengthen the national infrastructure for information and communication but also protect personal information and individual privacy.

4. Promote national and regional interconnectivity, as well as the regional harmonization of regulatory standards, in areas such as cost of access, and the use, introduction, renovation and maintenance of technologies and support to infrastructure.

III. Contents and Applications:

1. In order to reduce cultural and language barrier in cyberspace, produce multi-cultural and multi-lingual contents that involve local communities and favour the dissemination of knowledge associated with the promotion of values and principles such as respect for diversity, cultural pluralism and environmental equilibrium.

2. Promote basic community services such education and health and assure that contents and application serve the objective of social inclusion, protection of the cultural heritage and transparency in government.
3. Create an environment conducive to initiative and innovation, giving special emphasis to small and medium-sized businesses and industries.

4. Modernize urgently the laws on intellectual property and copyright in order to facilitate access to information.

5. Promote the development of projects to produce public domain software (freeware), giving preference to projects seeking to develop open source software.

6. Seek to develop equilibrium between copyright and the "fair use" of scientific, technological and medical publications (SMT) in order to promote an academic and educational framework for scientific research for development that will incorporate well-defined areas of public domain information.

IV. OPEN SERVICES:

1. Stimulate the development of interactive media, distance education, e-commerce and online public services, through the normalisation of commercial procedures and the harmonisation of new media formats with existing ones.

2. Promote the creation and operation of national and regional networks of research and development centres that will be oriented towards the use ICTs as a tool for development.

3. Articulate the creation of virtual universities network to promote innovation and transfer of technologies to industries and facilitate the elaboration of common policies.

V. STRATEGIC ASPECTS:

1. Highlight the importance not only of financial and technical support but also training in order to promote community participation and the development shared management.

2. Emphasize the importance of strategic alliances with access providers, the establishment of initiatives for the use ICTs for economic, social and cultural development, and the design and production of personal computers and peripheral equipment at low cost.

3. Develop actions aimed at disseminating information and sensitizing the public on the benefits of ICTs.
4. Develop an inventory of the communication media available for community development, such as geostationary satellites, whose assignment use for social development purposes was underscored by the Forum.

5. Promote the social control of data bases and use of ICTs in the public sector.

6. Use the purchasing ability of government to promote the technological development of national industries, while keeping in mind the international competitiveness of ICTs.

7. Use ICTs to promote employment through online work opportunities and the development of corresponding national industries.

8. Redirect a reasonable percentage of external debt payments owed to international finance institutions to programmes for the development of the Information Society.

DELIBERATIONS OF THE SUB-REGIONAL GROUPS CONCERNING REGIONAL PROGRAMMES:

The Latin American and Caribbean countries elaborated important strategic inputs for the Information Society and Knowledge Economy in order to achieve its economic and social goals and its development policies. Although these inputs, at both the national and sub-regional levels, reflect differences in their respective values, conditions, needs and aspirations, there nevertheless emerged from the sub-regional deliberations a number of common aspects. Given that the diffusion of new information and communication technologies has not yet had the hoped for impact, these common aspects can be seen as a strategic opportunity for a regional approach whose results could contribute to the overcoming of the most important challenges of the creation of the Information Society. The common areas of the sub-regions that could form part of a multi-sectoral regional programme are indicated below:

- **Strengthening of institutional capacities**
  - Reinforce dialogue and cooperation of governments with the private and public sectors and civil society in general in order to promote the growth of the Information Society and the Knowledge Economy in a manner that all can participate and benefit;
  - Facilitate the harmonisation of national and sub-regional strategies in order to promote the growth of the Information Society and Knowledge Economy;
  - Widen the institutional transformation of the public sector and government through e-government programmes.
• **Increasing the Contribution of the Information Society and the Knowledge Economy to Sustainable Economic Growth**

- Promote the construction of infrastructure with the goal of achieving mass use of the Internet and widespread distribution of advanced networks for scientific applications and economic, social and political development;
- Create incentives for the development of local content businesses and the uses of ICTs by businesses in all sectors of the economy;
- Increase, as a consequence of digitalisation, innovation inside and among enterprises so that they can create a communication and information industry within countries and in the region;
- Promote the introduction of new services, highlighting the importance of interoperability and standardisation.

• **Strengthening the Mobilisation of Resources and of All Social Sectors in order to Create an Institutional Infrastructure for Lifelong Learning**

- Improve the opportunities, results and quality of learning through the promotion of innovations in content, methods of financing, quality control and training of teachers;
- Integrate strategies for learning and employment within the framework of the Knowledge Economy.

• **Promote the Development and Use of Statistical Indicators that will Define and Measure the Information and Communication Sector in the Economies of the individual countries, Sub-regions and the entire Region.**