

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR BAGHER ASADI, CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77 (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN), AT THE COORDINATION SEGMENT OF THE SUBSTANTIVE SESSION OF 2001 OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Geneva, 2 July 2001

Mr. President,

Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, let me express, first and foremost, our deep appreciation for your active and engaged stewardship of the work of the Council, and for a comprehensive introductory statement. We commend the valuable, tireless efforts of yourself and the other distinguished members of the Bureau during the entire process of informal consultations back in New York. I should also take the opportunity to register our appreciation to the Secretary-General and the ECOSOC Secretariat for the excellent reports prepared for this year's substantive session, including for this agenda item on Coordination Segment.

As always, it was a pleasure to listen to the interesting and enlightening analysis of Mr. Desai, and also for an appropriate allusion to the pleasant and conducive climate in Geneva – which I am sure will also prevail in the hall on all agenda items before us.

Before continuing with the text, let me add my words of congratulations to the Secretary-General for his unanimous re-election to the second term. I should seize the moment as well to express our thanks to Sweden, the out-going Presidency of the European Union (EU) for all their cooperation and welcome Belgium, the incoming Presidency. Let me assure the Belgian colleagues of the best cooperation; myself and the whole Group, here in Geneva, in New York, and everywhere.

Mr. President,

This is the second year in a row that we have been dealing in the ECOSOC substantive session with the role of information and communication technology (ICT), which, if nothing else, should signify the importance of the subject to all of us in the Council, both developing and developed. I presume it is fair to say that a lot of progress has already been made, including as regards the establishment of the ICT Task Force. Since the Group has had the opportunity in the past to present its general views on various aspects of ICT, inter alia, in particular on the growing digital divide, I do not intend to repeat the positions and analyses which are fully known to the Council and our partners in the North. Instead, the emphasis in the present statement will be on some of the elements and aspects which we consider prominent and urgent for our prospective work, as also addressed in the Secretary-General's report.

The fact that the developing world and its sole universal deliberative body at the United Nations, the Group of 77, consider ICT key to their strategies for development hardly needs to be over-emphasized. What is at issue, therefore, is the role the United Nations system can and, in fact, should play in this context. Put in very practical terms, the question for us is how to strengthen the development role of the UN system; how to enhance the effectiveness of its development activities and its support for national development strategies and programmes by promoting access to and transfer of knowledge and technology. The question of building partnerships, an important emerging issue, also finds its place within this overall framework.

As in all other areas and fields related to development activities of the United Nations, the Group of 77 and China are very much concerned that the resources available to the UN system to assist the developing countries in meeting the challenges they face in designing the policies and strategies required to bridge the technology gap between the North and the South are simply inadequate. These resources, inclusive of ODA,

need to be strengthened and augmented, and substantially at that. We are, of course, very much appreciative of the commendable efforts of the Economic and Social Council in placing the issue of ICT for development at the forefront of the UN agenda and in raising general awareness of its potential for development. However, in our view, it is imperative that the United Nations and its related bodies should focus their work on issues central to transfer of knowledge and technology and the building of necessary domestic capacities, with a view to promoting the competitiveness of developing countries. No doubt, the ICT Task Force is a good practical step in this direction.

It is now common sense that the need for technology transfer arises from the fact that there is considerable concentration of knowledge and the technologies deriving from it in a limited number of countries, creating economic inequalities. To ameliorate, if not to remove, such inequalities requires accelerated transfer of knowledge and technology, especially ICT, to developing countries - and as everybody knows - on concessional and preferential terms and on a global basis. Further, needless to say, any transfer to be effective should be accompanied by adequate scientific capabilities and infrastructure and to be supported by proper institutional and legal framework, for all of which the developing world needs the active assistance of its developed partners.

Another area of concern for us in the developing world pertains to the content as well as sound and safe access to information through ICT. With due respect for the principle of unhindered free access to information, the Group believes that proper attention should be paid to putting in place of an appropriate regulatory and legal framework, at both national and international levels, for provision and dissemination of information in worldwide networks. Privacy needs to be protected, equally important, if not more so, are the boundaries of morality and cultural diversities cherished by different societies across the board.

Within the framework of the constant grappling of the developing world with new and emerging issues and challenges – lively and exciting if not confounding as we inevitably find them - we recognize the importance of e-commerce as a rather new and still unfolding channel for international trade. It is an area with far-reaching implications for our societies and economies and where we suffer from fundamental obstacles and shortcomings. Addressing this fact of life in the developing world cannot but be the beginning of the process; it should continue and be pursued with active engagement towards removing them. In this particular regard, we emphasize that the study process on trade-related aspects of global e-commerce should be continued.

Mr. President,

Let me now turn to the question of partnership. And as we all know, it was only last General Assembly session that we started dealing with it as a new agenda item, and that is exactly why the discussion could still be considered at its exploratory, if not embryonic, stage. I should stress, right at this very point, that the Group of 77 and China attaches, as a matter of principle, great importance to the role and participation of stakeholders, including the private sector, in activities towards the realization of the UN's goals and objectives. Based on this overall premise, we are well disposed and fully prepared to engage actively in a proactive and constructive dialogue with all interested negotiating partners on all aspects of this important subject. We caution, however, that any actual progress on forging partnerships should by necessity await elaboration, and more importantly, adoption, by the entire intergovernmental body, of the requisite elements and modalities for the intended – albeit desired - partnerships. In our understanding, the primary rationale for the proposed partnerships is to assist the private sector towards accepting and implementing the principle of good corporate citizenship; that is, bringing social values and responsibilities to bear on a conduct and policy premised on profit incentives.

With this mind, and also with due regard for the provisions of the GA resolution 55/215, stressing the need for member states to discuss partnerships and consider, in appropriate intergovernmental consultations, ways and means to enhance cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, the Group of 77 and

China stands ready to contribute to collective intergovernmental endeavours towards evolving a common vision and realistic approaches to promoting partnerships among all stakeholders to make digital opportunities a reality for all.

I close my statement on this point.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.