

**Address by Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi,  
Prime Minister of the Republic of Tunisia,**

**at the opening of**

**the International Forum on Information  
and Communication Technologies**

**« ICT 4 all Forum – Tunis+4 »**

Hammamet, November 24, 2009

## In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to open this International Forum on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) "Tunis+4" which is held under the patronage of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali as a reaffirmation of his attentive care for the event and his deep interest in promoting cooperation and partnership in this vital sector with a view to bridging the digital divide between industrialized countries and developing countries.

It gives me pleasure to welcome our distinguished guests: Mr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Mr. Hamdoun Touré, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Mr. Talal Abu Ghazaleh, President of the United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development (UN-GAID), Mr. Jean-Pierre Ezin, Commissioner of the African Union, and the Distinguished Ministers, Heads of Delegation and Heads of Institutions working in technological fields.

I also wish to express my warm thanks to all those who have participated in organizing this Forum which is a renewed occasion to deepen reflection, exchange views and experiences, crystallize effective ways to ensure just and equitable access to the information society, and consolidate the knowledge economy for all without exception or exclusion.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This Forum is convening four years after the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) which was hosted by Tunisia and which brought together over thirty thousand participants in its formal activities and sideline events. The participants were representatives of governments, international bodies, private sector and civil society. The WSIS constituted a milestone and a landmark in laying the groundwork for a new world information and communication order that would be just, equitable and mutually beneficial.

Our Forum is a unique opportunity to assess the steps taken in implementing the Summit recommendations and resolutions. These are enshrined in the "**Tunis Commitment**" document which expresses the will of the international community to forge ahead with mitigating the digital divide, and in the "**Tunis Agenda for the Information Society**" which embodies a collective desire to find practical ways to open up new vistas for all societies to benefit from information networks and communication technologies without barriers or hurdles.

The WSIS recommendations are action-oriented. They crystallize a methodology in line with effective approaches to secure equitable access to learning for all peoples, and African peoples in particular, and to consolidate the process at the level of the international community, within the framework of an agenda extending to the year 2015.

The topic entitled: **"ICT Innovation as a Tool for Strengthening Competitiveness and Growth"** is aptly chosen by the international organizations and the institutions that have organized the Forum. Indeed, the theme zeroes in on the requirements of the world juncture which is today witnessing the emergence of positive indications that the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis have been overcome.

You are no doubt aware that the ICT with their different components and services represent not only an opportunity to mitigate the acute consequences of the crisis but also a sector having a strategic dimension and considerable power to bring about permanent economic recovery and to quicken the pace of development in the industrialized countries and the developing countries alike.

Recent studies and some reports by international organizations and bodies have underscored the importance of the new reality created by modern communication technologies at the level of productive structures and their efficiency, at the level of individuals' attitudes, work methods and consumption, and at the level of trade exchanges, marketing and the variation of their growth pattern.

It has become an established fact today that the adoption and utilization of new ICT by the enterprise as part of its production systems and its service performance has structurally transformed many administrative, commercial and financial sectors and has enabled them, through technological innovation, to enhance their productivity, reduce their operating costs, increase their earnings and meet the expectations of their clientele.

Studies have been unanimous in concluding that there is a strong correlation between the ICT on the one hand, and the stimulation of economic development, employment and export on the other. The World Bank Report published a few months ago highlighted, by way of illustration only, that a 10-point increase in the percent of subscribers to the ADSL has a direct impact of 1.3% increase in the GDP of both industrialized and developing countries and a 10% to 14% increase in the job creation rate.

Similarly, economic evaluation reports state that over 30 per cent of the improvement made in the productivity of enterprises and their employees results from investment in the ICT, the spread of their uses and the exploitation of their innovative systems such as the Internet, computer applications and telematic services. Direct contribution to the rise in productivity over the past decade has reached 80 per cent in some industrialized countries such as the United States.

Likewise, digital exchanges using communication networks account alone for nearly 50 per cent of the world trade services within the new digital market which includes over 4.5 billion mobile telephone users and 1.7 billion Internet users. This

figure is expected to witness a 50 per cent increase by the year 2013. The growing movement concerns the high capacity broadband networks in particular whose number of subscribers has jumped to more than 420 million within a short period of time.

It should be noted, on the other hand, that the economic juncture during the past few years has been characterized by a remarkable and continuous growth at the level of investment in this promising sector. The average annual growth rate has been 17 per cent at global level over the past five-years. According to current forecasts, this growth is expected to continue during the next period particularly as regards networking and future services like those of the very high capacity fiber optic networks in which investment will grow at an accelerated annual rate of 30 per cent at global level.

Furthermore, the technological rapprochement and the integration of networks in respect of their products and contents in the areas of fixed telephones, mobile telephones, peripherals and television and multimedia products, have generated a new and promising economic space. They have also opened up vast avenues to innovation, research and creativity through software industry and its utilization, maintenance of digital equipment and systems, steering and management of local area networks (LAN) for enterprises and development of sharing networks. Those activities assume paramount importance as they ensure a fast development of all economic, social and cultural sectors. They also contribute to spreading the uses of electronic management, digital commerce, virtual banking, health care teleservices, e-training and e-education for the development of expertise and the upgrading of human resources.

We note in this context that the African market is currently attracting a growing volume of programs and investments and is achieving encouraging results as regards the development of access networks pursuant to the targets set, and recommendations made, by the WSIS. Mobile telephone networks, in particular, have quickly multiplied which has enabled the African continent to increase its telephone density to 40 for every 100 inhabitants at present up from hardly 9 per cent in 2004.

Against this backdrop, however, and as emphasized in the ITU and CNUCED report, we note that the issue of developing the knowledge economy and the information society is still dependent on acquiring a sufficient capacity to start spreading future networks, particularly high capacity services through fixed telephone networks or mobile telephone networks. We also note that the number of users of this type of network remains low in the African countries although it is now considered to be the infrastructure of all infrastructures. Current data indicate that the average density at African level is not more than 0.3 subscriber for every 100 inhabitants as against rates in excess of 20 per cent in the industrialized countries.

In the same context, the efforts made to reduce the tariffs of communication services, especially broadband Internet, are likely to help bridge the digital gap and ensure access for enterprises, households and all categories of society. Reports of international organizations have stressed that those tariffs are still too high in the least developed countries most of the time exceeding 100 dollars a month as against not more than 30 dollars in the industrialized countries.

We consider that the various themes to be examined and tackled at this international forum by senior officials within international organizations, public institutions, worldwide corporations and experts will contribute to charting an ambitious course of action for Arab and African countries, in particular, in the areas of technological innovation, development of value-added service offers, and development of an appropriate framework for investment in digital networks particularly those of future generations.

The technological exhibition held outside the forum and the series of sideline events organized on this occasion provide a useful environment for exploring partnership opportunities between public and private sectors and between different countries.

In this connection, we may emphasize Tunisia's diligent efforts to strengthen partnership relations with all fraternal and friendly countries, international corporations and business people in the field of investment, and in developing the intelligence industry and building the knowledge economy. The aim is to actively participate in the United Nations efforts to implement the resolutions and recommendations of the WSIS, and to reduce the digital gap between countries and between peoples.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Tunisia has adopted a modernizing approach for our society at the behest of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. This approach is based on spreading digital culture through reliance on integrated dimensions for developing the ICT sector, successive programs and reforms for modernizing communication infrastructure, providing an appropriate legal framework, training highly qualified human resources and granting incentives to make Tunisia an attractive regional hub of investment.

The efforts made thus far have enabled our country to achieve remarkable results as the ICT have become a key economic sector and a central motivator of integral development. The sector contribution to the GDP has increased to 11 per cent from about 7 per cent in 2005.

As for the telephone density, it has attained record levels for mobile telephones with a coverage rate of about 88 subscribers in every 100 inhabitants.

The year 2009 has witnessed the launch of many major programs aimed at further energizing the high value-added communication and service sector. Tunisia has managed to grant a new license to a third provider of fixed communication and Internet services as well as second and third-generation mobile telephone services. Within this framework, the results of the international call for bids to complete this operation have highlighted the great confidence that foreign investors and finance and business circles have in Tunisia and in the promising developmental perspectives that our country provides.

This year has also witnessed the implementation of a series of major programs and projects that President Ben Ali had initiated. These are represented in particular by the setting in operation of a new submarine cable linking Tunisia to European countries and having a great capacity to develop and modernize

communication traffic including telephone, Internet and a diversity of services beside reducing communication costs.

The year 2009 has moreover witnessed the introduction of successive reductions in the tariffs of international communication connections for enterprises thus enabling companies to benefit from quality communication services at competitive costs. Furthermore, the tariffs of Internet services for the citizen have witnessed a reduction in excess of 50 per cent during the year, which has helped achieve a fast increase in the number of subscribers to the broadband Internet and in the spread of its uses.

In order to further facilitate the establishment of international companies in our country and to create appropriate conditions for Tunisia to position itself on the digital economic map of the globe, the industrial zones and service sites have been equipped with a fiber optic network which enables the enterprises working in those spaces to access high speed data transfer rates in excess of 100 megabytes per second.

In the same trend, next year will witness the introduction of a major extension of technological spaces to house enterprises that work in the promising sectors such as the transfer of services based on offshoring networks. An area of 200,000 square meters will be provided in the form of technological complexes with modern buildings, developed networks and rapid services to meet the growing demand from foreign enterprises and investors. It is expected that these technological spaces will be increased to 500,000 sq. meters thus making Tunisia a global technological destination and a hub of promising activities.

On the other hand, work will start on the implementation of an ambitious training program leading to certificates of proficiency in various specializations including program development, database management, operating systems, network management and computer security. It is hoped that 10,000 trainees would obtain such certificates of proficiency in a first phase within the framework of effective partnership between the public sector and the private sector.

The current dynamic is in line with the wide prospects that President Ben Ali's Electoral Program has opened up for the next five-years. In this program, the knowledge society, technological innovation, and the use of Internet and modern techniques occupy a central position amongst other ambitious objectives. This is reflected in the efforts made to provide access for all and to develop high capacity for one million new subscribers to broadband Internet.

The ambitious approach is also reflected in the significant position given to the adoption of new technological generations of mobile telephones, to the introduction of radio networks, and to the capacity increase of our country's connection to the Internet from 11 gigabytes per second in 2008 to 27 gigabytes per second by the end of this year and to 100 gigabytes per second by the end of 2014.

The great ambitions of the Electoral Platform are further reflected in the objectives set in the chapter on developing digital substance and contents through implementation of digital television to cover the entire population by the end of 2014. The

conversion will help intensify digital programs beside re-utilizing the currently used frequency modulation, to develop future very high capacity radio communication services.

The Presidential Program has focused on encouraging associations and organizations to take advantage of the Web sharing technology and to intensify programs to ensure a digital opportunity for every Tunisian family in general and for pupils and higher education students in particular.

In order to upgrade and consolidate the immaterial economy and to enhance Tunisia's digital standing, a national agency for the promotion of investment in the digital economy will be established. Its purposes will be to supervise project sponsors and enterprises, to provide technological spaces and modern communication networks, and to assist with the implementation of digital projects. Significant efforts will also be made to realize the projects relating to electronic management. To that effect, the integrated administrative network will be implemented and about 200 new administrative e-services will be provided through communication networks and through development of the public health information system. In this connection, a modern high speed communication network will be put in place to modernize the national network comprised of 280 health enterprises.

The education and training sector occupies an essential position with an expected increase in the number of engineers to approximately 9,000 graduates in 2014.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Modernization and development in our countries are dependent on our capacities to redouble the efforts made by governments, regional and international bodies, the private sector and finance institutions to promote partnership and exchange of experiences in the best ways to push ahead with investment, innovation and use of available opportunities to consolidate cooperation, communication and solidarity with a view to filling the digital divide.

The next African Summit, which will be devoted to the promotion of the knowledge economy and to the ICT sector in the African continent, represents an appropriate framework for setting effective objectives to spread the digital culture and to intensify the use of modern techniques to promote balanced and sustainable socioeconomic development.

I am confident that this international forum on the "ICT4ALL", with the participation of this distinguished assembly of senior officials and experts, will lead to action-oriented proposals and to projects that would be programmable, bankable and implementable by the public sector, and the finance and business circles working in the fields of the knowledge economy.

In conclusion, I renew my welcome to our distinguished guests and my appreciation to all participants in this forum, wishing your proceedings every success.

.Thank you for your attention

