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Partnership for building the Arab information society
Damascus, 22-23 November 2004

**DAMASCUS CALL
TOWARDS PARTNERSHIP FOR BUILDING THE
ARAB INFORMATION SOCIETY**

Damascus Call Towards Partnership for Building the Arab Information Society

We, the participants assembled in Damascus on 22 and 23 November 2004, within the framework of the Second Regional Preparatory Conference for the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), the second phase of which will be held in Tunis in November 2005:

Stemming from our deep appreciation for the international community movement towards the information society and knowledge-based economy, and following the availability of an international referential framework, represented by the outcome of the first phase of WSIS, Geneva 2003, namely the adopted declaration of principles and global plan of action;

Believing that information and their exchange form a basic component of the global economy, alongside the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor, and their impacts on the comprehensive and sustainable socio-economic development, together with the preservation of cultural identity, as well as the legacy of civilization, and historical and linguistic heritage;

Taking into consideration the ambition of countries in the region for development and the strengthening of their information and communication technology (ICT) sector, in view of the fact that most countries in the region are currently consumers of ICT and receivers of products from other regions in the world, while we possess fine cultural values that can be presented to others;

In view of the fact that the realization of expectations and target goals at the national and regional levels requires the collective and prompt efforts, and close cooperation amongst all stakeholders for building the information society, whether governments, private sector, civil society, or Arab regional and international organizations, within a partnership framework that induces determination and supports the exchange of expertise; a partnership within which roles are integrated, and the duplication and repetition of mistakes are avoided, and that benefits from the comparative advantages of the key active players, and is realized through specific investment programmes and projects;

Strongly convinced that the realization of sustainable development for countries in the region, starting from the Millennium Development Goals, is the best guarantee for creating a bond between citizens and their countries. This could be through the creation of employment opportunities in the ICT sector for women and qualified youth;

Taking into account the distinct regional efforts made to date in the Arab region within the framework of the League of Arab States and the United Nations system;

Expressing our complete conviction of the need for exerting more efforts at the operational level, and after reviewing a group of programmes and projects, proposed by regional and sub-regional organizations, boards, and specialized entities in the region, as well as the "Framework for Collaborative Action" that was adopted by the League of Arab States, in Cairo, June 2003, and the Regional Plan of Action that was proposed by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

We call upon:

All stakeholders concerned with building the Arab information society, especially governments, the business community and civil society institutions, and regional and international organizations, to examine the programmes and regional projects included in the proposed Regional Plan of Action, and declare their willingness to participate in holding their share of responsibilities, once the Plan is approved by the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers, and in accordance with the adopted mechanisms and standards and through the specified focal points; in addition to proposing new programmes and projects for enriching this plan.

We also call upon:

1) The Arab states to:

a) Provide the suitable enabling environment for fostering regional and foreign direct investments, through formulating strategies, policies, suitable plans and their implementation mechanisms, in addition to introducing the corresponding laws and legislations, and instituting procedural frameworks that encourage investment at the regional level;

b) Support the proposed regional action plan, following its approval - as above, within the partnership framework and its associated mechanisms;

c) Collaborate at the inter-governmental level, and with the United Nations system and regional and international organizations, in order to facilitate the implementation of regional projects.

2) Civil society non-governmental organizations to:

a) Be part of quality and homogenous groups, and contribute new feasible projects, based on agreed priorities;

b) Participate in the projects of the adopted plan and assume leadership of some of them, in order to increase their chances of success and guarantee project sustainability for the benefit of Arab communities;

c) Promote regional activities for building the Arab information society, and focus on the programmes and projects that lead to its realization.

3) Business community to:

a) Participate in partnerships with other stakeholders for executing projects of the adopted Regional Plan of Action and developing the ICT sector in the region;

b) Contribute to the transfer of technology to Arab countries, and propose projects that facilitate building capacity at the local level and producing information technology tools, especially those related to the Arabic language and development of digital Arabic content.

4) Financing institutions to:

- a) Give priority to investing in projects of the adopted Regional Plan of Action, especially those aimed at raising industrial capacities in the region for the creation of entities capable of dealing with the opportunities and challenges of globalization;
- b) Seek the establishment of corporations and various types of capital funds to support the development of the ICT sector, and finance ICT regional projects;

We also call upon ESCWA, the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to:

- a) Intensify cooperation according to the policies and directives made by the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers, and the Ministerial Committee of ESCWA;
- b) Formulate a mechanism for partnership through an interactive Internet website, for activating partnership and creating an effective space of interaction amongst stakeholders, in order to attract new partners and support continuous dialogue for the effective implementation of the programmes and projects of the adopted Regional Plan of Action;
- c) Unify efforts to proceed ahead with the practical steps for the adoption of an Arabic Domain Name System on the Internet;
- d) Give special priority to the projects related to Arabic content services and industries, which constitutes common grounds for the Arab community;
- e) Follow-up on the implementation of the adopted Regional Plan of Action; and
- f) Provide consultative services to member countries in the areas related to the implementation of the adopted Regional Plan of Action.