SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS

STATEMENT FROM CANADA

**Statement delivered by The Honourable Mac Harb, Senator
before the World Summit on the Information Society
Tunis, November 17, 2005**

Mr. President — it is a privilege to address this distinguished audience today on behalf of the government and people of Canada.

All of us have come to Tunis to reflect on the positive role this Summit can play by developing a vision of the future for our societies – a vision of an information and knowledge-based society.

The mere existence of advanced communication systems does not, by itself, ensure progress. Our vision must have people at its centre. Unless we set out, with purpose, to harness the benefits of the information age for the betterment of our people, we cannot expect to reach our development goals. As the Canadian scholar, Marshall McLuhan, once said, "There are no passengers on spaceship Earth. We are all crew."

In a rapidly-changing technological field, we can rely on one thing to remain constant: human creativity and innovation. ICTs have developed as a direct result of our collective innovation. We humans are innately driven to express ourselves. That is why, Mr. President, the information society that we aim to build must be rooted in respect for the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media, and regardless of frontiers.

Restricting these freedoms is contrary to the obligations all countries represented here entered into the day they signed the UN Charter. Restricting the freedom of opinion and expression impoverishes a society. It deprives it of the vitality, creativity and diversity it needs to thrive. It should be clear, Mr. President that, here, I am not talking about the responsibility of states to fight against the use of ICTs to promote racial hatred, child pornography and trafficking in humans.

Throughout the Summit process we have stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders in an integrated process. Without participation from civil society, including the private sector, this Summit could not have achieved its goals. The same is true for the information society. We are pleased that the documents before us for adoption further enshrine cooperation between the UN system and civil society.

In Geneva, we agreed on an outline for the Information Society we envisage as set forth in the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. In Tunis, we pledge our determination to see the commitments of the Summit implemented well beyond this Summit. We will do so working together with all the stakeholders within an integrated process. We have also ensured the continued stability and security of the Internet, while at the same time we have committed to evolving and improving how we, as governments, deal with Internet-related public policy issues. The way we will do that is through an expanded process involving international institutions, governments, and civil society including the private sector.

Our challenge as a world community is "to harness the potential of knowledge and technology" to achieve the Millennium Development goals. How do we put this potential to work to alleviate poverty? Building on our own national experience in developing an information society strategy and on the work of existing "ICT for development" initiatives, Canada has proposed a number of guiding principles accepted this Summit: an enabling environment; development of human capacity; mainstreaming ICTs for development; and access for all.

Canada is fortunate to have a diverse population. Fostering the creation and preservation of local content has built Canadian excellence in this field. Canada's linguistic heritage includes English, French and Indigenous languages. We are proud of the three Canadian recipients of the Tunis World Summit Awards in the categories of e-government, e-inclusion and e-health.

Today, Canada is one of the most connected countries in the world. We are global leaders in connecting schools, communities and governments in every part of our vast land. We have pledged to ensure that high-speed or broadband services are available in every Canadian community, including Canada's remote areas and northern regions.

This goal can only be reached through multi-stakeholder partnerships: government, the private sector and civil society – all working together. Such partnerships enhance grassroots involvement and help to empower communities. We are pleased that the WSIS has set an example of how such partnerships can work in the UN system.

Civil society provides real-world perspective on the possible uses and applications of ICTs. The views of Indigenous peoples, the disabled, youth and the academic and scientific communities, to name but a few, must be heard.

The Government of Canada has worked with non-profit organisations, such as the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, to ensure that civil society representatives from across Canada could provide feedback on our WSIS preparations.

Through out the Summit process, Canada has been happy to partner with the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples and aboriginal communities to bring their perspectives to the WSIS, and to lay the groundwork for developing an international indigenous portal.

Canada recognizes the need to engage young people as the future stakeholders in the information society. We have supported youth participation at the Geneva and Tunis summits through the WSIS youth caucus and, in this instance, through SchoolNet Africa. We applaud the dynamism of the youth groups and the Summit awareness campaigns which they mustered in close to 30 countries.

For a sense of our approach to the uses of technology for development, I encourage all delegates to visit Canada's pavilion at the ICT 4 All Exhibition and to spend some time with Canada's International Development Research Centre, along with the other departments and agencies represented there

The Canadian International Development Research Centre has done pioneering work with researchers from the South. A unique $21 million public/private partnership has been forged between IDRC, the Microsoft Corporation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation to support the telecentre.org initiative for building capacity of local telecentre operators around the world.

In addition, the Canadian e-Policy Resource Centre, Canada's contribution to the Global ePolicy Network (ePol-NET), serves as the focal point for consolidating Canadian expertise and resources to support the efforts of African countries to develop national e-strategies and policy. The Canada Fund for Africa is contributing $10 million over three years.

The global "Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development" was established in June 2004. Since then it has produced methodologies and provide resources for ICT statistics relevant for development. Canada is a key contributor to the partnership. We warmly welcome the recent release of the publication, "From the Digital Divide to Digital Opportunities: Measuring Infostates for Development."

Over the last few days it has been exciting to discover many success stories. Stories of success in building a diversity of information societies, and stories of commitments made to help close the global digital divide. In spite of these achievements, our task has barely begun.

Achieving our vision of an information and knowledge-based society will require unprecedented levels of commitment, imagination and above all partnership. Let us all pledge to work together to achieve the noble goal of building an inclusive information society that supports freedom and opportunity for all.