

International Chamber of Commerce at the Global Alliance for ICT and Development Inaugural Ceremony – Speech by Talal Abu-Ghazaleh

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On behalf of the Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Guy Sebban, and ICC member companies around the world, I am pleased and honored to join all of you here in Kuala Lumpur, during the launch of the Global Alliance for Information and Communications Technologies and Development.

I would like to share a few thoughts from the global business community, as we inaugurate this vitally important initiative. The Global Alliance is an opportunity for business, governments, civil society and international organizations to come together, to help more people, in more corners of the globe, to gain the use of information and communications technologies (ICT). These technologies are powerful tools to promote economic growth and social development. We must empower more people through the use of these tools.

As a supplier of business services in the Arab region and beyond, I have repeatedly witnessed, firsthand, the power these tools have to rapidly transform businesses and society in the developing world. And how, when all stakeholders pull together, "ICT for development" can move swiftly from concept to reality. As a key partner in this process, business has expertise and a font of experience that it's willing to share. Stakeholders should tap business capabilities at national, regional and international levels. The Global Alliance can help maximize the use of business resources by promoting communication between business and other stakeholders.

For many years, business has served as a major partner in many initiatives, to promote ICT use for development. These initiatives should be built upon and multiplied.

Business brings investment to ICTs. Entrepreneurs innovate and create jobs. Entrepreneurs also educate and train the workers of today and tomorrow. Equipped with the right skills and the right education, the world's citizens are able to seamlessly fold in the use of ICTs at work, at play and in public life.

As the Global Alliance starts its important work, business supports the dialogue that will take place here. That dialogue will enrich understanding among all stakeholders of what it really takes, especially in developing countries, to take full advantage of ICTs. What it takes, first of all, are legal, policy and regulatory frameworks that promote competition and investment, protect intellectual property and stimulate innovation. This is the foundation which must be laid first, to progressively build upwards - towards a truly inclusive Information Society.

At the same time, we must foster a shared understanding, among all peoples in all countries, of which bricks and mortar to use in building this Society: Why a certain type of brick works in some countries or in certain economies, but is not suitable for the climate of others; and how choosing the wrong type of brick can create a faulty structure and make it difficult to continue building.

To construct this Society, it's clear we will require the partnership of each of - business, government, civil society and international organizations. The Global Alliance must be a meeting place where all stakeholders can share experiences, where partnerships can evolve, and where all can benefit from a fruitful exchange.

Through this Alliance and other post-WSIS activities, business looks forward to working towards a greater consensus with other stakeholders, on important policies which will shape future access to ICTs and how ICTs are used. Business aims to take an even more active role in helping to shape the agenda for the future configuration of our Information Society.

To that end, I am pleased to announce that businesses spanning the globe are joining forces, under the leadership of the International Chamber of Commerce, to lend business acumen and experience to the Global Alliance. Through a new initiative launched by ICC, Business Action to Support the Information Society, or BASIS, world business aims to bring its experiences to this Alliance, and other global gatherings, such as the Internet Governance Forum, and the WSIS action lines and follow-up activities.

The BASIS initiative is an indication of the commitment businesses of all sizes, from all sectors, and all parts of the globe, are making to all the important work on the Information Society, begun through the United Nations.

As the chair of BASIS, and on behalf of ICC's Secretary General, I am proud to say that business is here in Kuala Lumpur to help lay the cornerstone for the Global Alliance. Business will assist in this massive construction project, working in concert with the entire global community, as we do our utmost, together, to fulfill the mission set out by the Global Alliance.

Thank you.