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Regional Follow-up to the Outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society

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Opening Statement by

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh

Chair & CEO, Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization (TAGorg)

www.tagorg.com

Chair, UN Global Alliance for ICT and Development (GAID)

www.un-gaid.org

ESCWA
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**Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I. ON THE WSIS

- To begin with we do not live in one world. The divide, in more than one way, is our major challenge. At WSIS in Geneva and in Tunis I spoke of the unfair race between Lions (representing the developed countries) and Gazelles (less developed countries). The lion needs to run only faster than the slowest gazelle to catch it and eat it. The gazelle has to run faster than the fastest lion in order to simply survive. Unfortunately the gap between the developed and the developing seems to grow rather than to narrow.
- Accordingly we need to develop different paradigms for the developed and for the developing countries and, to be courageous about it. Yes, there are variations in each of the two worlds. But they have one thing in common: being on one side or the other of the dividing line.
- We need to admit that we, all of us, failed to achieve the MDGs and to stop searching for fractional successes. If so, let us all go back to scratch the blackboard, start from scratch, and draft new MDGs. We should not give up.
- The world is transiting (in the privileged part of it) from the information age (the pumping age) into the knowledge age (where information is used intelligently for knowledge creation). Next we shall (hopefully) move up to the wisdom age (where knowledge is used wisely for the benefit of humanity).
- In January 2009 I was elected to chair the “Afro-Asian Knowledge Initiative”. Again I extend my hand in that capacity for your vision 2025 for Asia and Africa. That initiative was created under the recognized “Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Movement” based in Egypt.

II. ON ICT4D

- "ICT for Development"? Yes. Yet I also believe that "ICT Development" itself is a prerequisite for “ICT for Development”. Let us emphasize both tracks-interrelated as they are. I call on UNCTAD leadership to take the lead on this.
- Infrastructure development in all its aspects must be a priority, for the developing world of course, not merely in ICT.
- Information Technology is moving faster than Telecom technology development. A failure by business. Industry needs to accelerate telecommunications technology development to catch up. I call on ITU leadership to take the lead on this and to get business in full gear.

- Broadband potential is underutilized- for the benefit of the by developing nations of course. Much more needs to be done - by business too under ITU leadership.

III. ON THE WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS

- The financial crisis attack has been reasonably absorbed. We now face the much more serious economic crisis attack. The first is like a hurricane. The second is like an epidemic.
- I know that many will disagree with me. The solution is not in avoiding protectionism, but is rather in a balance between liberalization and protectionism. Let us admit that this is what the developed countries are doing now.
- I call on governments and intergovernmental organizations to engage business as full and equal partners with equal responsibilities. Business is the major creator of knowledge and wealth. Business role is crucial for all purposes. Business should be seen only as more than a subject or a tax payer for government, but as a partner.

IX. ON INNOVATION

- Innovations in IT were accelerated by business profit motivation. The freedom in cyberspace encouraged greater investment in IT. There, the world is yours.
- Telecom is to be credited for its role as a medium for the internet. Yet telecom should become more of a free space in itself rather than just a free space for I.T. Governments and Business should jointly work towards that goal.
- I foresee a telecom revolution similar to that in IT., making telecom universally free in access and free in cost! Only that can lead us to the realization of the so-called "death of distance" dream!
- In this world of short-termism, we lost sight of the fact that IP, innovation, and R & D are the major weapons of economic power and competitiveness. We need to go back to basics. We need to motivate profit motivation for innovation in all fields.
- We need to search for answers why didn't "mobile telephony" become the "telephone", just like how "e-mail" becomes the "mail".

X. ON GAID MISSION

- As GAID newly elected Chair (to succeed Intel's chair Craig Barrett), I wish to announce that I plan to propose the following new mission statement to GAID leadership.

- UNDESA-GAID shall act as an inclusive, multi-stakeholder global forum, composed of representatives from public, private and civil society sectors as well as international organizations, for policy dialogue and partnership-building to promote the use of ICT for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to enable and catalyze multi-stakeholder partnership for action under the GAID umbrella.
- UNDESA-GAID should address the slow pace of progress towards the achievement of the Millennium development goals (MDGs) in the heart developing countries and the added difficulties by the ongoing world economic and financial vises.
- UNDESA-GAID, during these challenging times, will focus its key message on how ICTs and innovation can be harnessed to meet key global challenges such as poverty eradication, the financial crisis, climate change, governance and mainstreaming gender within the broader United Nations Development Agenda.
- The upcoming GAID Global Forum, scheduled to take place on 2-4 September 2009 in Monterrey, where leaders from governments, the private sector, civil society and academia will get together for a focused dialogue on how to bring about innovation for education in policies and practices.

XI. ON SOME TAGORG INITIATIVES

- Now for some personal vision. The real (brick & mortar) world helped humanity through the creation of one-stop shops: malls, department stores, supermarkets, mega stores etc. we need similar resources in the virtual world: knowledge oasis.
- I invite you to visit, or send your staff or representatives, to the “Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Knowledge Society” center as an innovative model, officially inaugurated in Amman under Royal patronage last week, or visit its website **www.tagks.com**. We have registered it as business method and are in the process of franchising it. This is a TAG-Org Corporate Social Responsibility contribution.
- Another TAG-Org CSR: TAG-PEDIA, an Arabic monitored content, wikipedia like, virtual encyclopedia. While I applaud UNESCO’s digital library initiative, TAG-Org will seek to build a partnership between TAG-PEDIA and UNESCO’s Arabic digital library.
- One more TAG-Org CSR: The Arab Knowledge Society Report: Status and Action Plan. Again we are talking to UNESCO about cooperation in this Endeavour and would be happy to call it “Arab Vision 2025”.
- We believe in the old wisdom that “the best way to predict the future is to shape it.” And guided by Shakespeare “we shall continue to seek, to strive, to find, and to not to yield.”

Damascus, June 16, 2009