



Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization



**Follow-up to the Implementation of WSIS Outcomes in Western Asia
Damascus, 16-18 June 2009**

***Statement by Mr. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh
Chairman, Global Alliance for ICT and Development
Opening session: 16 June 2009, 9:30 am, Umayyad Congress Palace***

HE Mr. Imad Sourani - Minister of Communications and Technology, SAR
Mr. Bader Omar Al Dafa - Executive Secretary, UN-ESCWA
Mr. Sami Al-Basheer Al-Mourshid - Director – ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau
Mr. Tarek Shawki - Director, UNESCO Cairo Office
Mr. Sarbuland Khan - Director, UN - GAID

Distinguished Guests,

I would like to start by expressing my sincere appreciation to our hosts, Mr. Al Dafa and his staff at the economic and social commission for Western Asia for their excellent initiative to bring us together today and for their warm welcome.

I must confess that I am very happy to be here for several reasons. First of all, it is a special occasion for me, as it is my first public intervention as the newly appointed Chairman of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA-GAID). I am grateful for and humbled by the call to service by the United Nations Secretary-General. I invite you to join me in re-invigorating our efforts, under the umbrella of the Global Alliance, to put information and communication technologies, and their innovative applications, at the service of the peoples of the world, particularly those who live in poverty, the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. There is a strong urgency to this as there is precious little time left until the target deadline of 2015 for achieving the millennium development goals. Recent set backs, both natural and man-made, are reversing the advances of recent years and pushing more people below the poverty line. ICT offers us a chance to make a difference, but we have to seize the opportunity now. It is our responsibility, be it right here right now, or at the WSIS or CSTD meeting in Geneva, or at the Economic and Social Council or the General Assembly in New York to work with governments and the private sector to foster the kind of policies that will nurture innovations in science and technology to meet development challenges.

Secondly, it is auspicious that as one of the first acts of my tenure as chairman we will launch tomorrow the GAID Regional Network in the ESCWA region that is very dear to me. I renew here my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Al Dafa for hosting the Secretariat of the GAID Regional Network and facilitating the launch. The Network will provide a valuable opportunity to exchange experiences in order to maximize the effectiveness of initiatives and to scale up efforts in the Arab region to meet the objectives of the World Summit on the Information Society in support of the Millennium Development Goals. Your participation is necessary to further support, strengthen and contribute to ICT for Development initiatives in the region, and to make sure that the aspirations of this region are rightfully represented in the international policy-making bodies.

The Global Alliance has worked closely with the regional commissions in the creation of these regional networks. GAID enhances and supports regional efforts by bringing the global and international stakeholders, particularly from the private sector to engage with and contribute to these networks. We will continue to make this our priority. Our aim will be to support the mission, the objectives and priority areas that you define for your region and to channel your inputs to the global level. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow afternoon in this same venue for the launch session.

Finally, I would like to say, as a long-time participant in the global scene, that I am very pleased that the leadership in implementation of the WSIS outcomes is shifting back to the regional level. The Geneva-centered follow-up processes have clearly shown their limits. There is a lot more potential for effective progress at the regional level, where the WSIS principles and recommendations can be firmly anchored in the design and implementation of national ICT policies and strategies. It is the perfect complement to the Geneva-based action lines follow-up processes which of course remain necessary but are not sufficient. I applaud the initiatives of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean last February, the Economic Commission for Africa last April and now of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. It is my hope that these regional networks and efforts will build inter-linkages among them so as to learn from each other's experiences and benefit from mutual synergy.

Over the past few months, the GAID networks and its worldwide community of members have been engaged in an intensive online discussion on its mission and priorities for the coming year. This has led to a broad and emerging consensus that GAID should adopt a mission for the coming year that is closely aligned with the objectives and priorities of the United Nations and focus its attention on poverty eradication, the economic recession and climate change as well as on governance and gender.

Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot end my statement without inviting you to the upcoming GAID Global Forum, scheduled to take place on 2-4 September 2009 in Monterrey, Mexico. We will address an issue that I know is extremely important for stakeholders in the Arab region, how to bring about innovation for education in ICT for Development policies and practices. My fellow Co-Chair in the GAID Steering Committee, Mr. Ramon Alberto Garza, and I look forward to welcoming you in Monterrey for a vibrant discussion.

Let me close by assuring you of my personal support and commitment to making this region a dynamic example for others to follow in innovation and ICT for Development.

Thank you for your attention.