

Monday 14 Jan. 2002

Jordan becomes Arab regional hub for UN information technology task force

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan on Sunday officially became the Arab regional centre for the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (UN-ICTF), charged with ensuring global participation as part of efforts to bridge the digital divide.

"In light of successes in various pilot efforts, it is now increasingly believed that the so-called digital divide echoes the social and economic divides that are so apparent and deep in the developing world. In fact it appears that the digital divide that is emerging in the Third

World as the elite gains access to the new technology, will deepen the social and economic divides if nothing is done to counter it," said Ove Bjerregaard, the deputy resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Speaking on behalf of UN Resident Coordinator Costante Muzio at the inaugural of a two-day meeting of the task force, patronised by HRH Prince Faisal, Bjerregaard said access to the new technology was the UN's first priority.

"The key target is to cut

poverty in half by 2015 ... The task is therefore formidable, but the target is not unrealistic, provided we marshal the political will that is required," he added saying ICT's true value or role lies in facilitating productivity gains through sharing of best practices, dissemination of knowledge and improved planning and implementation of various schemes.

"Networking across the region must therefore be combined with strong national initiatives in order to have impact," he said, noting that ICT has

become a national priority in Jordan where it is hoped that at least 30,000 IT jobs will be created over the next few years.

The regional network centre, whose work is based on alliances among the public sector, civil society and the private sector was launched upon an initiative by the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Talal Abu Gazaleh & Co. International (TAGI) and the Information Technology Association of Jordan (int@j).

Regional Networks will provide region-specific

support to and strengthen the UN ICT Task Force in its activities to help bridge the digital divide.

Their work involves providing regional forums for ICT for development related issues, including strategy, infrastructure, enterprise, human capacity, content, applications and smart partnerships.

The UN ICT Task Force, officially launched by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan last November, was the fruit of an initiative agreed upon in the commissioner's session for the UN Economic and Social Council.

The first agency of its kind — whereby governments, the private sector and other stakeholders act as equal partners in utilising ICT for serving world development — will work towards bridging the digital divide as well as creating digital opportunities.

The objective of the task force is to provide overall leadership to the UN's role in helping formulate strategies for the development of information and communication technologies and putting those technologies at the service of development by forging strategic partnerships between the UN system, private industry and financing trusts and foundations, donors and other relevant stakeholders.

The UN ICT Task Force will consist of 18 members representing their governments; 8 members of whom will be elected from the private sector, 6 from development and funding agencies and 4 from non-governmental organisations.