



Speech Delivered by

**H.E. Dr. Margarita Cedeño de Fernández
First Lady of the Dominican Republic**

**In representation of
H.E, Dr. Leonel Fernández President of the
Dominican Republic**

**Launch of the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) in
Geneva, Switzerland
14 March 2005**

H.E. Mr. **Abdoulaye Wade**, President of Senegal and Founder of the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF)

H.E. Mr. **Olusegun Obasanjo**, President of Nigeria and President of the African Union

H.E. Mr. **Yoshio Utsumi**, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and Secretary-General of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

H.E. Ms. **Micheline Calmy-Rey**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland

H.E. Mr. **Michel Barnier**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, France

H.E. Mr. **Homero Luís Hernández Sánchez**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations and International Organizations, Geneva, Switzerland

H.E. Mr. **Pierre Muller**, Mayor of the City of Geneva

H.E. Mr. **Christian Ferrazino**, Mayor of the City of Geneva and Spokesman for the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF)

Honorable **Guy-Olivier Segond**, President, Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF)

Honorable **Alain Clerc**, Executive Secretary, Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF)

Honorable **Ligia Amada Melo de Cardona**, Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (SEECyT)

Mr. **Domingo Tavarez**, Director-General, President's Office for Information and Communication Technologies (OPTIC)

Mr. **John R. Gagain Jr.**, Executive Director, Presidential Commission on the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development (COPDES)

On behalf of the Dominican Republic; my husband, President Leonel Fernandez; and myself, I appreciate the invitations of **Presidents Wade and Obasanjo**, which allow my country to be present on this important occasion—the formal inauguration of the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF), which will open new opportunities for developing and least developed countries. By doing so, we will be able to enhance the mission of developing and expanding technology by including our people in what we call the information and knowledge societies. Additionally, we especially appreciate the warm hospitality that we have received from our host and Mayor of the City of Geneva, Mr. Pierre Muller.

The advantages presented by the Information Society, represent a great revolution of which our people stand to benefit. Facilitating access to the Information Society for each community, home, and citizen; and making a transition from the pre-industrial era to the digital era, must be our overall national and international objectives, which will need the support of all Member States, their united efforts, as well as sufficient resources—all important and necessary for the achieving this goal.

The Dominican Republic is a small Caribbean country that shares the island of Santo Domingo with Haiti. With a size of 48,442 square kilometers and a population of 8.6 million inhabitants, more than 3 million live in conditions of extreme poverty, without basic necessities, without access to technologies, and excluded from the development process and the potential benefits that globalization could offer.

The Dominican Government, conscious of the fact that poverty is not only a question of a level of income, but also, the inherent lack of opportunities and access to capacity building. These opportunities, should connect economic policies with an inclusive social program, which would guarantee the underprivileged access to benefits produced by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by playing a large role in promoting scientific, economic and social development throughout countries, eliminating the distances and time that separates them from the rest of the world as well as common knowledge.

The Dominican Republic, together with Senegal, has the honor of having been selected as one of the eight pilot countries of the United Nations Millennium Project, created by Secretary-General Kofi Annan and directed by distinguished economist Dr. Jeffrey Sachs. We believe that this wonderful initiative, proposed by President Wade could be presented as a viable financial mechanism that would ensure that our countries, especially those of the African Union, achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Without a doubt, in today's global world, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have an impact on our everyday lives, because they permit the creation of wealth through the increase in production and competitiveness. It is important to recognize, however, that access to ICTs offers great opportunities for various countries, but could present a serious challenge for developing and least developed countries, of which we all represent. Frequently, the use of ICTs is limited to those more economically fortunate populations, which

contributes precisely to the increase in the digital and social divides—not only among countries, but also within them.

During the last few years, the Dominican Republic’s telecommunications sector has been of fundamental importance for the national economy, which fosters the increase in “tele-density”, which has allowed us the ability to have 39 telephones for each 100 inhabitants, 11 of which are fixed-lines and 28 cellular. However, we have a low level of those with access to Internet services, with only 1.2 accounts for every 100 inhabitants, all of which are concentrated in the large cities where you will find all of the political, economic, and social echelon. Those that reside in the rural area and the marginalized urban outskirts remain detached from the benefits and opportunities offered by ICTs.

It is for this reason that President Leonel Fernandez has created an ambitious plan focused on closing the digital divide by improving access and connectivity, digital literacy, ICT capacity building, the development of an E-Government infrastructure, the technological capacity of educators, the promotion and use of E-Commerce tools, as well as business’s involvement in using ICTs.

With respect to the implementation of these projects, President Fernandez has appointed the Office of the First Lady the work of making technology a service of the people, particularly those inhabitants of the most impoverished areas of the Dominican Republic. Because of this, we have developed a comprehensive and very ambitious plan to install 135 Community Technology Centers, one in each municipality throughout the country, so that

those extremely poor communities have the opportunity to be a part of the development process as well as our social, cultural and economic advancement. The overarching goal of this plan is to contribute to the fight against poverty, inequality, and the digital divide in the Dominican Republic, all of which stands to be one of the utmost challenges of the 21st century. Fulfilling this goal will ensure that we strengthen and promote the “knowledge society” as well as our achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Each one of the Community Technology Centers will aim to build the capacity of the citizens of the community, their knowledge and ability to effectively utilize ICTs by making them part of their daily lives. The Centers will allow access to telephone services, fax, Internet, universal knowledge; database creation, information processing, healthcare and environment best practices, and program training that prepare citizens to compete in the labor market.

In addition, our primary aim is that these Community Technology Centers become places where citizens could conduct commercial banking transactions, transmit documents; access E-Government services and virtual libraries; as well as create small businesses that benefit the local community and thrive by having access to updated ICTs.

From the Community Technology Centers, we will promote the design, execution, and application of programs that achieve the effective and profound inclusion of women and young girls in new technologies, which would increase gender equality at the

local level—an important precedent for sustainable development and social justice.

Now we know that in order to implement and comply with the vision of President Fernandez, projected since his first administration, it requires large investments, which present great challenges for the Dominican Republic, a country that is recuperating from one of the worst economic crises in its history. In order to fulfill the President's long-term vision, the involvement and support of the private sector, civil society, high-tech corporations that produce ICTs, at both the national and international level, is vital.

We firmly believe that the Dominican Republic and other countries like ours will need to rely upon a Fund that would contribute to the financing of ICTs, as a mechanism for promoting health, employment, trade, production, quality education, and the creation of wealth for those low-income communities. It is important for ensuring our competitiveness in the long-term.

The greatest challenge that we confront is the development of a real connectivity agenda that permits extended access of all geographic points throughout the Dominican Republic.

Another challenge is accessing the required funds for guaranteeing the long-term sustainability of the Community Technology Centers, from an economic as well as social standpoint. It is especially important to ensure that these communities benefit from the Community Technology Centers by assimilating themselves long enough to permit that the those

users convert themselves into responsible citizens in a sustainable economy that benefits all equally.

On behalf of the Dominican Republic, my husband, and myself, I would like to give thanks to President Wade for his vision and leadership, and for having proposed the creation of the Digital Solidarity Fund during the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which was held in the beautiful City of Geneva.

Also, to Guy Olivier Segond and Alain Clerc, President of the Digital Solidarity Fund and Executive Secretary, respectively as well as the Fund's spokesperson Christian Ferrazino for having permitted us to become founding member of this initiative, which without a doubt, promises to be one of the most positive outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). On the same note, we would like to recognize the relentless efforts of those Member States of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) that worked to receive approval of the Fund during the Second Preparatory Committee meeting of the Tunis Phase of the WSIS.

We believe that the Launch of the Digital Solidarity Fund constitutes a historical step for our nations. It provides a tangible and viable opportunity for facilitating South-South cooperation in favor of ICTs and ensuring that we achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

The initiative that we inaugurate today is without a doubt a positive step that facilitates the integration of developing and least developed countries in the reduction of the digital divide as

well as their inclusion in the Information Society. The Government of the Dominican Republic and President Leonel Fernandez so happily accept with honor, the opportunity to participate as founding member of this prestigious group of nations that compose the Digital Solidarity Fund. We reiterate our dedication to the “Geneva Principles” that form the norms of the Fund.

We look forward to playing an active role in this initiative, where we hope to offer our experience, our work and collaboration of a visionary government, which we hope you consider a friend in these efforts. We fervently believe that through the opportunities offered by ICTs, we could achieve sustainable human development.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you reflecting on the thoughts of the renowned author Victor Hugo who states and I quote: **“The future has many names. For the weak, it is unachievable. For the fearful, it is unknown. For the courageous it is an opportunity.”** And, we firmly believe that this initiative is a true opportunity for all of us.

Thank you very much.