

Support grows for cyber solidarity

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Swiss Foreign Minister Calmy-Rey (left) and President Wade of Senegal at the ceremony in Geneva (swissinfo)

A new fund has been inaugurated in Geneva aimed at financing the spread of information technology in the developing world.

Several heads of state and government minister, including the Swiss foreign minister, Micheline Calmy-Rey, attended the ceremony to launch the Digital Solidarity Fund.

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Calmy-Rey praised President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal for launching the proposal at the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society.

"The fund will boost projects in local communities rather than just financing infrastructure projects," said Calmy-Rey.

She stressed the need for action to bridge the digital gap between rich and poor countries.

The minister said that 75 per cent of the world's internet users lived in the industrialised world and nearly 80 per cent of the global population didn't have access to information technology.

Calmy-Rey added that it was important to support women in the developing world, because they were the driving force of economic development.

For his part, Wade praised the fund as a decisive step which would boost the development of the internet in the developing world.

Apart from contributions from several countries, the fund is to be financed through the private sector. There will also be a one per cent tax on the sale of information technology, such as mobile phones, in Europe.

Swiss involvement

The fund is headed by a former member of the Geneva cantonal government, Guy-Olivier Segond.

Its founding members include Senegal and several regions and cities in Europe, notably the Swiss city of Geneva and the northwestern town of Delémont.

The United Nations officially decided to support the initiative in February last year. It also has the backing of about 200 cities and towns in more than 100 countries.

On Monday Nigeria, Algeria and France pledged a total of €1.3 million (SFr2 million) towards the fund.

However, the Swiss government has yet to decide whether to contribute to the fund, according to a senior Swiss official.