UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN - ECLAC



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REPORT OF THE REGIONAL MEETING ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil, 20 and 21 June 2000

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Mandate

1. The Regional Meeting on Information Technology for Development was held in accordance with United Nations Economic and Social Council decision 1999/281 of 30 July 1999, in which the Council resolved that the high-level segment of its substantive session of 2000 should be devoted to the theme "Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based economy". This meeting served as the regional forum preparatory to the high-level segment of the Council's substantive session.

Place and date of the meeting

2. The meeting was held in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil on 20 and 21 June 2000.

Attendance¹

3. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following States members of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC): Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. It was also attended by Bernd Niehaus, Ambassador of Costa Rica to the United Nations and Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Economic and Social Council.

Election of Officers

4. The following presiding officers were elected:

Chairperson:

Brazil

Vice-Chairpersons:

Chile

Rapporteur:

Jamaica Colombia

¹ See the annex.

Documentation

5. The participants had before them the following documents: "Latin America and the Caribbean in the transition to a knowledge-based society. An agenda for public policy", prepared by ECLAC (LC/L.1383) and dated June 2000, and "Brazilian background paper for discussions at the Latin American and Caribbean Seminar on Information Technology and Development", prepared by the Government of Brazil.

B. SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS

- 6. At the opening session of the meeting, statements were made by Bernd Niehaus, Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Economic and Social Council; Reynaldo Bajraj, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; Ronaldo Sardenberg, Minister for Science and Technology of Brazil; and Esperidião Amin, Governor of the State of Santa Catarina.
- 7. The Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Economic and Social Council, speaking on behalf of the President of the Council, said that in the past 10 years an unprecedented revolution had occurred in the field of telecommunications and information management which was having a striking impact on economic and social relations throughout the world and which had in fact created an entirely new economic environment. Thanks to the digital revolution, a nation's wealth was no longer measured in terms of the value of its natural resources but instead on the basis of the knowledge and talents possessed by its citizens. That revolution offered the developing countries new opportunities for growth, for competing in the world market and for boosting production. If those opportunities were used wisely, it would become possible to create more just societies, but in order for that to be accomplished, resolute political leadership was essential, since such leadership would be needed in order to adopt an efficient and equitable strategy that would serve as a genuine State policy to guide the future development of the countries of the region.
- 8. The developing countries were confronted with a series of obstacles that prevented them from taking full advantage of new opportunities for economic and social progress in such fields as finance, linguistics, training and infrastructure. In order to surmount those obstacles, all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, together with the international community as a whole, would have to commit themselves to bridging the digital divide between rich and poor nations. The United Nations ought to play a key role in that process by helping to guide development policies along a path that would allow the countries to take fuller advantage of the digital revolution.
- 9. The Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC, after welcoming the participants on behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Commission and conveying to them his confidence in the successful outcome of their work, said that the institution placed special importance on the

meeting, which would provide another opportunity for the Latin American and Caribbean countries to exchange experiences relating to issues and problems of shared interest and, even more importantly, to explore possible solutions. Many of those solutions were to be found within the sphere of national decision-making processes, and it would therefore be helpful for the participants to discuss possible solutions with their peers. There were also other solutions, however, that were of a collective, regional nature and could therefore be addressed on the basis of joint activities.

- 10. In addition to the region's natural capital, constructed capital and generous endowment of natural resources, the Latin American and Caribbean countries possessed an intangible form of capital. That capital was represented by their potential for cooperation based on their common origins, long-standing bonds of solidarity and vision of a shared future. It had been manifested on innumerable occasions and was all the more important when what was at stake was the full incorporation of the countries of the region into the flows of technical progress that had a direct bearing on the future well-being of the region's population. The present meeting could, therefore, provide valuable inputs for the Economic and Social Council which would enhance its overall perspective and contribute to the success of the high-level segment of its substantive session.
- 11. The Minister for Science and Technology of Brazil said that the advent of the information society redefined the countries' position within the international economic system. A new technical and economic paradigm was emerging that was shaping the efforts being made by the countries to promote development and well-being. The effects of that phenomenon far outstripped those of other systemic economic and financial forces that had influenced the fate of the developing countries in recent decades. Thus, it was imperative that a strategy for establishing linkages with the new digital economy should be formulated; that strategy should be reflected in the delineation of objectives of social and economic inclusiveness and equity and in a commitment to safeguard democracy and the exercise of the rights of the individual.
- 12. If the evolution of the information society were left entirely to the vagaries of market mechanisms, it could ultimately lead to an exacerbation of social inequalities in developing countries and of other negative aspects of the economic globalization process, which, if based on information and communications technologies, might also pose a threat to cultural diversity and identity. The developing countries therefore had a legitimate interest in helping to determine the conditions under which the diffusion of that new paradigm was to take place. The present meeting provided a unique opportunity to synthesize the concerns, objectives and efforts of the Latin American and Caribbean countries in relation to the information society, as well as attesting to the region's fundamental interest in formulating a policy for the development of advanced technologies and in engaging in a dialogue in that regard.
- 13. The Governor of the State of Santa Catarina greeted the participants and underscored how interested all of the meeting's organizers were in seeing it to a successful conclusion. The meeting's objective could be summed up by a single word: "intelligence". The ability to convert intelligence into an instrument of justice depended upon a modern, innovative use of information technology in accordance with the defining principles of full-fledged citizenship. The great

challenge in that respect was to find a way of converting skills into an effective means of reducing social and economic exclusion. In the case of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, that challenge represented a crucial struggle to preserve the integrity of national sentiment and the genuine integration of the region.

- 14. The Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC then recalled that both innovation and technical change had long figured as fundamental elements in the thinking of ECLAC. In fact, in the series of studies it had published in the early 1990s concerning its proposal for changing production patterns with social equity, ECLAC had argued that the demands of globalization made it necessary to focus on the role of technological change and had underscored the importance of competitiveness as an essential factor in economic growth. The region had endeavoured to become competitive, on many occasions, by relying on the utilization of its natural resources, which had led to their depletion in many cases, and by undervaluing its labour force, a step which had hindered the efforts of the majority of the population to gain access to goods and services. Both of those avenues represented spurious means of developing competitiveness; authentic competitiveness was derived from offering more for less, and its only genuine sources were technical advances and technological change.
- 15. The purpose of the meeting was to analyse a modality of technical change that had taken on enormous importance: changes in information and communications technologies that had spread beyond the realm of production into a wide array of spheres. That phenomenon was not only important in and of itself but also reinforced the positive effects that technical change had on economic activity, since it was taking on an increasingly systemic character rather than being confined to individual firms or production units. The new information and communications technologies were themselves inherently systemic, in addition to being one of the factors that ensured that other technological changes would be of a systemic nature as well.
- 16. As indicated in the document presented by ECLAC at the meeting, "Latin America and the Caribbean in the transition to a knowledge-based society. An agenda for public policy", there was a risk that the new information and communications technologies could heighten existing conditions of inequity and exclusion. At the domestic level, the digital divide could exacerbate the existing uneven distribution of income and power, while the digital divide between countries could deepen the differences existing between the developed and developing worlds.
- 17. The document presented by the ECLAC secretariat at the most recent session of the Commission, entitled "Equity, development and citizenship", provided a valuable frame of reference for an analysis of the implications of technological change. The point of departure for that analysis was a recognition of the fact that one of the dimensions of the globalization process was the gradual spread and the transcendence of ideas and values such as those of human rights, social development, gender equity, respect for ethnic and cultural diversity, and environmental protection. In view of its importance as the inevitable starting point for the information technology strategies and policies that the countries of the region might adopt in the future, the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC provided an overview of the legacy of the 1990s as described in the document prepared by the secretariat. In that connection, he referred, in particular, to the obvious

progress made on the economic and social fronts and to the stagnation or deterioration of income distribution and existing problems with regard to social cohesiveness, since those factors should serve as the backdrop for an in-depth analysis of the possibilities for the adoption of suitable information and communications policies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- 18. The ensuing open-ended discussion began with a statement by the representative of Brazil in which he referred to the context and objectives of the meeting. The document prepared by the Government of Brazil referred to concrete aspects of policies for the development of information and communications technologies and for expediting the transition to a knowledge-based society. His Government felt that opportunities and incentives for the private sector were of prime importance, as were the formation of links between it and the public sector, which was one of the items on the economic agenda, and the provision of access to services for all users, which was an integral component of the social agenda.
- 19. Statements were then made by the representatives of Peru, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador, Uruguay and Jamaica, who agreed with the views expressed by the representative of Brazil and the issues addressed in the document prepared by the ECLAC secretariat. They also reported on activities undertaken by their countries in an effort to provide greater access to information and communications technologies. One of the delegates stated that, in addition to defending the countries' cultural and linguistic integrity, it was also necessary to open up new business opportunities for firms in the region and to set up regional coordination mechanisms in order to protect the market niches that they occupied. Another representative voiced concern about the fact that the information society's access routes were privately managed, even though the public sector was responsible for defining the framework for that society. The representatives also referred to the need to establish standards that would protect citizens' rights to privacy, ensure the safety of network transactions and prevent crime within that sphere. A number of delegations expressed interest in increasing the use of information and communications technologies in education, in the provision of support to small and medium-sized enterprises and in the protection of intellectual property rights.
- 20. In view of the fact that access to information networks was largely determined by its cost, it was proposed that computer laboratories should be set up in basic educational institutions so that children might begin computer literacy training at an early age; it was further suggested that network access should be provided at municipal centres and public libraries. It was also recognized, however, that the production of materials for distribution via that medium was just as important as the provision of access to the network itself.
- 21. While all the representatives agreed that the universalization of access largely depended on the presence of the necessary infrastructure, some delegates focused on the need to reduce its cost and to offer services that would persuade users to obtain network connections. They felt that the private sector should assume part of that cost, thus sharing it with the public sector, which could offer tax incentives for Internet connections. Importance was also attributed to the development of mechanisms for the creation of a regional infrastructure that would be as advanced as possible.

- 22. As the scope of the discussion was broadened to include other areas, the idea was raised of creating mechanisms for external debt negotiations that would permit the countries' debt burdens to be reduced in exchange for the execution of activities designed to provide access to the information society; it was noted in that connection that such an initiative would require the identification of specific measures that were found to be relevant for those purposes. One of the representatives reminded the participants that, since specific conditions varied from country to country, any recommendations made in that respect should be weighed carefully.
- 23. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of clearly identifying those areas on which the application of new technologies should focus; one particularly significant area in that regard was education, since if technological development did not go hand in hand with a parallel learning process, its benefits would be extremely limited. It was noted that the impact of computerization could be measured by following the example of the member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, which had developed methods of proven accuracy.
- 24. In view of the myriad policies involved, in order for the region to secure increasingly broader access to the information society, the integration of the public sector, the private sector and civil society was essential. The participants' attention was drawn, *inter alia*, to the need to promote the software industry, which a number of countries had been working to develop in recent decades, with mixed results. It would therefore be in the region's interest to create incentives for that industry, including the relevant marketing activities.
- 25. On Wednesday morning, 21 June, a panel of experts met to analyse three issues: the past and present technological development of Latin America; information technologies: past and future strategic action; and a case study of cooperation in the field of technological innovation. Presentations on those subjects were given by Jorge Katz, Director of the ECLAC Division of Production, Productivity and Management; Iván Moura Campos, President of Akwan Information Technologies; and Ramiro Jordán, Director of the Ibero-American Consortium for Education in Science and Technology.
- 26. In the first presentation, innovative activities carried out in the region before and after the structural reforms of the 1990s were discussed and the implications of those reforms in terms of the transition to a knowledge-based society were examined.
- 27. The panelist giving the second presentation focused on the status of informatics in Brazil. The break-up of the monopoly that had existed in that field in 1997 had been an important strategic measure which had made it possible for any firm to offer Internet service, with the exception, in order to forestall unfair practices, of the telephone company. The growth of the informatics industry in Brazil was opening up new opportunities for the development of intermediate products, and it was important for the public sector to play an active role in that area.
- 28. The third presentation dealt with the specific case of the Ibero-American Consortium for Education in Science and Technology, which provided services to firms, universities, governments

and international organizations in Latin America, Spain and Portugal. The Consortium's highest priority was to educate persons in positions of authority about the importance of science and technology, a sector to which some countries devoted a scant 1% of their gross domestic product.

- 29. During the afternoon of 21 June, the delegates met in plenary session and approved by consensus the Declaration of Florianopolis, which set forth the needs identified by the representatives of the countries of the region and their recommendations regarding information technology (see section C).
- 30. During the closing session, statements were made by Reynaldo Bajraj, Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC; Bernd Niehaus, Ambassador of Costa Rica to the United Nations and Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Economic and Social Council; Jorge Berrizbeitía, representative of Venezuela; and Paulo Bonhausen, a Congressman from the State of Santa Catarina.
- 31. The Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC said that the meeting had generated a number of important outputs. The first and foremost of those outputs was the Declaration of Florianopolis, whose value would ultimately have to be judged by the countries themselves and whose effects would be seen in global negotiations and national policies. The most significant immediate result of the meeting was the dialogue established among the participants, all of whom were experts who were committed to their work and to sustainable development. It was to be hoped that the dialogue would continue, as had occurred in other areas in which ECLAC had witnessed an ongoing learning process and the formation of increasingly strong ties.
- 32. The Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Economic and Social Council said that the participants were to be highly commended for the work they had done. The process of which the present meeting formed a part represented a new –and perhaps the last–opportunity for the developing world to join the world economy. The prime objective of the United Nations was to achieve genuine results, and what had been achieved at the regional meeting would undoubtedly reinforce the Council's efforts, as well as having important implications for other areas of the Organization's work.
- 33. The representative of Venezuela, speaking on behalf of all the delegations in attendance, said that the ground-breaking meeting that had just been held was a reflection of how important technology and communications were for the development of the region. The commitment that they had assumed represented the first step towards the region's integration with the rest of the world in that field and towards its recognition as an important market within the context of the globalization process.
- 34. The Congressman for the State of Santa Catarina, speaking on behalf of its Governor, congratulated the participants and thanked them for the confidence they had shown in the Government of Brazil. The debates had been extremely valuable because they had brought out the needs and importance of the sector, which would enable the participants to become genuine agents of the integration process. The governments of the region also needed to act as agents for

that process in response to the urgent call being made by society in order to contribute to the region's recognition at the world level and to the well-being of its peoples.

35. The participants then adopted by consensus the Declaration of Florianopolis, which is reproduced in full in the following section.

C. DECLARATION OF FLORIANOPOLIS

Bearing in mind decision 1999/281 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, in which the Council resolved that the high-level segment of its substantive session of 2000 should be devoted to the theme "Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based economy",

Taking into consideration the fact that, in accordance with this decision, representatives of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have gathered at the Regional Meeting on Information Technology for Development, convened by the Government of the Federal Republic of Brazil in the City of Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil on 20-21 June 2000, in order to prepare, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in its capacity as secretariat, for their participation in the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, to be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 5 to 7 July 2000,

<u>Taking into consideration also</u> the shared aspirations of the Latin American and Caribbean countries to become full-fledged members of the information society by the year 2005 on an efficient, effective and sustainable basis within the framework of the global knowledge-based economy,

Considering that information and communications technologies constitute the central pillar for the construction of a global knowledge-based economy and society and that they therefore constitute the basis for a new form of organization and production on a worldwide scale that is redefining the way in which the countries position themselves within the world economic system as well as the relationships existing among individuals, culture, and the exercise of power and citizenship, and that knowledge will be an increasingly important determinant of competitiveness in the global economy,

Bearing in mind that allowing the evolution of the information and knowledge-based society to be guided solely by market mechanisms entails the risk of an amplification of the social gaps existing within our societies, the creation of new modes of exclusion, an increase in the negative aspects of globalization and a widening of the distances between developed and developing countries,

<u>Cognizant</u> of the great potential that such technologies have to further the social and political development of the countries of the region in such areas as education, health, job training, the eradication of social marginality, the consolidation of citizen participation, transparency in government action and the formation of more open, democratic societies,

Bearing in mind that during the past decade significant progress has been made in the region in correcting fiscal disequilibria, reducing inflation, increasing the pace of export growth, pursuing regional integration processes, attracting foreign direct investment and resuming economic growth, which reached a rate of 3.2% for the region as a whole but which has continued to be insufficient to achieve a significant reduction in existing social and technological gaps; and that the economies of the region continue to register low savings and investment rates, sluggish job creation, pronounced structural heterogeneity and a high degree of external vulnerability and fragility in their financial systems,

<u>Mindful</u> of the fact that the challenges of development and of overcoming the poverty and social marginality that affect 36% of the population require sustained, ongoing economic growth which encompasses sectors that create productive jobs on a large scale and which permits increased, equitable access to all social services,

Considering that, if information technology is suited to our culture and if relevant content is created on an ongoing basis, then diversity can be enhanced and cultural identity reaffirmed,

The representatives of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean gathered in Florianopolis, taking into account all the aforementioned considerations, hereby urge the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council to support the developing countries in their efforts to pursue the following courses of action:

- 1. <u>Design and implement</u> public programmes with a view to ensuring that the entire population has access to information and communications technology-related products and services as soon as possible, disseminating their use, promoting the growth of digital network infrastructure, and supporting research, innovation and technological development in general and at the level of individual business enterprises;
- 2. <u>Create</u> the necessary conditions and mechanisms for the universal provision of training to citizens in the use of new technologies and for the achievement of broader computer literacy by, in particular, fostering innovative initiatives in the areas of distance learning, nonformal education and teacher training as an essential basis for enabling the population to play a positive role in new forms of knowledge-based production, while also promoting the access and use of information and communications technologies in methodologies designed to accelerate the educational processes of marginalized population groups and those living in extreme poverty;

- 3. <u>Provide</u> opportunities for sensitization and training in information and communications technologies for political and community leaders, drawing upon the experience gained from programmes designed to promote the information society;
- 4. <u>Develop</u> such mechanisms and make such investments as may be necessary, in collaboration with the private sector, so that all locales in every country of the region will have community centres providing digital connectivity in order to overcome the marginalization of the population from access to services provided by the new economy, including, *inter alia*, electronic commerce, telemedicine and on-line administrative procedures, by building up physical infrastructure and paving the way for broad access to digital networks;
- 5. <u>Promote</u> more efficient, effective and transparent government administration at all levels by offering on-line information to citizens, management oversight mechanisms, services, administrative procedures and government outsourcing of goods and services via digital networks;
- 6. <u>Encourage</u> the development of technology-based firms by creating such mechanisms as venture capital funds, technology incentive zones and business incubators with the participation of academic institutions, research centres and the private sector while also promoting their national, regional and international integration through the use of advanced research and development networks;
- 7. <u>Develop</u> regulatory systems that, in addition to protecting intellectual property rights, minimize the risks and uncertainties of the new environment generated by the new information and communications technologies through the provision of services that will ensure and lead to the swift expansion of electronic commerce by establishing competitive conditions and protecting the privacy and other interests of users, consumers and small-scale producers that engage in electronic commerce;
- 8. <u>Actively seek out</u> forms of financing and means of promoting corporate innovation and modernization, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, so that firms will have access to new business opportunities, thereby facilitating the creation of new and better employment opportunities;
- 9. <u>Strengthen</u> cultural and science and technology institutions so that they can take full advantage of information and communications technologies that will permit the generation and diffusion of diverse cultural contents of a regional, national or local nature via digital networks;
- 10. <u>Promote</u> research and societal ownership of advanced information and communications technologies and <u>work for</u> the establishment of high-speed networks in the region;
- 11. Adopt measures aimed at reducing the cost of communication services, promoting the development and consolidation of state-of-the-art national and regional communications infrastructure, upgrading the "capillarity" of information and communications networks within their

various territorial units, substantially upgrading key functions such as applicability and interoperability, and facilitating a swifter diffusion of technological innovations;

- 12. <u>Deploy</u> cooperative regional efforts relating to public policies on information and communications technologies, to include consensus-based participation in relevant international forums concerned with, *inter alia*, electronic trade, security, the protection of privacy and intellectual property rights, and public policies designed to forestall monopolistic practices;
- 13. <u>Strengthen</u> regional cooperation through the introduction of innovative mechanisms such as the promotion of joint technical/commercial ventures in the information and communications technology sector that will enhance the value of the region's productive potential and diversity through its integration into the new economy;
- 14. <u>Promote</u> the upgrading and reorganization of public- and private-sector communications infrastructure with a view to creating optimum conditions for interconnectivity and interoperability while ensuring sufficient capacity to meet the demands of two-way traffic;
- 15. <u>Reinforce</u> the creation of joint mechanisms for the development, consolidation and marketing of high-technology products and services, such as software development, distance education and others:
- 16. <u>Promote</u> the creation of a regional "observatory" to monitor the impact of information technologies on the economy and other related cooperative measures;
- 17. <u>Promote</u> the generation of reliable, standardized and up-to-date statistical information and indicators on the development of information and communications technologies in the region and its countries while promoting statistical-system coordination mechanisms;
- 18. <u>Foster</u> the development of local, national and regional content in the native and official languages of the countries of the region and the residence of that content on regional servers with a view to rationalizing access for local and regional traffic and promoting its exchange via the most direct routes:
- 19. Adopt measures that will permit a reduction to be made in the developing countries' external debts in exchange for funds that those countries will devote to their programmes for promoting economic and social development through the use of information and communications technologies;
- 20. <u>Call upon</u> the international community to provide technical and financial cooperation at both the multilateral and bilateral levels in facilitating the aforementioned internal efforts, and <u>invite</u> the relevant private firms in developed countries to join in this cooperative effort.

Annex

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. Member States of the Commission Estados miembros de la Comisión États membres de la Commission

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