

Internet Governance Forum in Athens 2 November, 2006

Closing Ceremony Speech on behalf of Basis, Business Action To Support the Information Society, and the International Chamber of Commerce. Delivered by David Appasamy. Chief Communications Officer, Sify Limited

Good evening

I am David Appasamy from Chennai, India. I am very pleased to speak on behalf of BASIS, Business Action to Support the Information Society, and the International Chamber of Commerce.

I would like to start by recognizing the contribution of all who invested themselves in this process. That's a long list, including: all the members of civil society, those from business, academia, the technical experts and the representatives of government – in addition to our generous Greek hosts and, of course, the IGF advisory group Chair and Secretariat.

As I acknowledge all these people, it reveals how extraordinary this event has been! Not only did the number of participants surpass expectations, but the great diversity of groups and perspectives has ensured its success.

As you know, the last ten years have been a time of hectic expansion of the internet. Opportunities have appeared. Problems have emerged. Technology has advanced. And interests have crystallized. This forum has been an opportunity for all of us to reflect, to catch our breath, and to take stock.

In doing so, this first IGF has done exactly what those who proposed it a year ago hoped it would do: it has brought all of us together on an equal footing. This precious feature of the IGF is essential in ensuring the most constructive process possible.

Over the last four days we have exchanged perspectives, discussed best practices and shared our thoughts about the way forward. We have had the opportunity to present our understanding of what is being done, what has to be done, and how best to do it.

On Monday, we said – if people leave the event having learned something new, and of value, this inaugural IGF would have succeeded. By this benchmark ... it surely has.

What's more, coming together has been a way to break down walls, and build bridges to others who share common goals.

As we look ahead to the next IGF, we see the need to focus even more of the discussion on development. While we can be proud of the capacity building that has been started this year, the many challenges of development need greater attention. These are not just lofty ideals; they are opportunities to change lives.

Making real progress in this area is important:

- To every six-year-old in Ghana who wants to learn to read,
- To every thirty-year-old in India who can expand the scope of business online, and
- To every rural village that wants to create opportunities to secure its future.

We all have a responsibility in making these a reality.

In India, we see the internet as a powerful catalyst for economic and social change. Business helps this process through its investment, expertise and innovation. However, as many existing partnerships demonstrate – pooling resources and expertise with other stakeholders can strengthen efforts and expedite progress.

While some of the challenges may seem daunting, we must rise up together to meet them – by remaining committed, creative and cooperative. Otherwise, as Mr. Desai has pointed out, there will be profound consequences and painful missed opportunities. We have made progress in India, but I see first-hand how much more there is to do.

The IGF dialogue has just started. There are more people to involve and a long way to go. The discussions this week have made one thing clear: no single group can manage or resolve all the challenges by itself. So it must continue to be a multi-stakeholder commitment, where we work together to succeed.

Some have asked where the action is, and what tangibles have been achieved. Well, the wisdom and experience gained are of great value in and of themselves. If we go on to plant these seeds at the national level, and cultivate them by working with all stakeholders at this level, they are certain to bear fruit.

When we come together again next year in Rio, we hope to see even greater involvement from all stakeholders – particularly those in the developing world. The second IGF can be the opportunity to drill deeper into the issues identified; and perhaps to offer workshops focused on practical skills that can be used to further national ICT strategies,

This first IGF has laid the foundation, it is the start of a legacy we all have a stake in building – one that will ensure the inclusive, people-centered information society to which we all aspire.

Thank you.