

G-7 and the Information Society

The global information society is a work in progress in all countries through the ongoing development and expansion of broadcasting, cable, telecommunications, satellite and other communications technologies. The full economic and social potential of the information society will be realized only when the products and services resulting from technological development are available to, and used by individuals, businesses and governments the world over.

This information revolution will create both the challenge and the means for countries to manage and expand their economies and fully integrate into the world economy. Canada has much expertise to offer and much at stake in the information society, given that more than half of all commercial activity in Canada is related to providing information and services.

At the February 1995 conference in Brussels, ministers of G-7 countries agreed upon core principles, and re-emphasized the need for all countries, including developing countries and countries in transition, to be integrated into the global information society. In Brussels, Canada led the drive to focus on developing and providing content and services for the information society, thus creating at the same time jobs and consumer demand that will encourage industry to invest in the information infrastructure. The core principles guarantee that all citizens will share the benefits of the information society; they will be assured of having the means to experience their own culture while being provided with access to the best of the world's cultural content.

In May 1996, South Africa hosted the Information Society and Development (ISAD) Conference. Some 10 developed countries (including the G-7) and 30 developing countries attended. The objectives of the conference were to launch a dialogue between the developed and developing worlds and within the developing world on the emerging global information society; to begin the process of defining a shared vision for the information society; and to work towards common principles and collaborative actions.

The ISAD Conference followed the Brussels format, with ministerial sessions complemented by workshops in which the private sector and, for the first time, members of the general public participated. In addition, an exhibition enabled various countries to share the expertise, experience, and innovations — in terms of both technology and content — that can support the social, economic, and cultural needs of the developing world.

In South Africa, the Canadian delegation and private sector participants demonstrated their commitment to partnership with the developing world, and their belief in the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity to growth and development. It is critical that developing countries, as nations and as full