

World summit mission: Internet access for all

By Marty Logan
Special to Sentinel-Voice

TUNIS (NNPA) - Now that the world's powers have agreed to stop squabbling over control of the Internet (for now), the more than 10,000 people here for the recent United Nations forum focused on creating an information society for all people. That was the goal of the week-long World Summit on the Information Society, part two of which was held in the capital of this North African nation, ended Nov. 18. The first round of the WSIS was held in Geneva in 2003.

One example of the so-called "digital divide" between the world's rich and poor: Roughly, the same number of people use the Internet in the world's eight economic giants as in the

other nations combined — 429 million users in the former versus 444 million in the latter, says the United Nations.

Representatives of the world's governments agreed to leave control of the technology that runs the Internet — the most potent symbol of the Information Age — in the hands of the United States, and instead to hold talks on devolving that role to an international forum. But no binding powers were established for the new body.

U.S. Ambassador David Gross says he is "thrilled" over the last-minute deal after three years of negotiations. "It reaffirmed the role of technology to the world and preserved the unique role of the U.S.," he told a news conference as the summit's

opening ceremony proceeded.

Assistant U.S. Secretary of Commerce M.D. Gallaher called the deal a vote of confidence in "market principles" and the "free flow of information" that he said are hallmarks of the U.S. information society. By "engraining the use of technology for economic development," the new approach will help narrow the digital divide, he told journalists.

The next three days of this mammoth conference site consisted of countless seminars and workshops hosted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international bodies like the United Nations, along with demonstrations and sales pitches by private sector participants hawking the latest tech gad-

gets from gleaming temporary booths. All of this activity is meant to set the world on the path to start closing the digital divide by 2015, the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals that aim to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty.

While the shadow cast over the WSIS by Internet governance faded, a cloud still loomed over the event. The host government of Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali blocked several NGOs from participating in the conference and from meeting at various outside venues.

Journalists and freedom of expression activists jailed in recent years for their writings remain in detention. On Nov. 10, representatives of some of these groups orga-

nizing a citizens' summit in a local hotel to run parallel with the WSIS were informed that the venue was no longer available because of a sudden need for repairs.

Summit organizers agreed to meet at the Goethe Institute, a German cultural center in downtown Tunis, but were prevented from entering by several dozen plainclothes police.

According to a journalist working with the ad-hoc Tunisia Monitoring Group, journalists were also blocked from approaching the institute.

Those prevented from entering the center include Souhayr Belhassen, vice president of the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights; Mahmoud Dhaouadi, a member of the Union of Tunisian Journalists, (an unauthorized organization); and representatives of Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other international freedom of expression groups.

"Eventually, some of these delegates were able to

meet when a high-level German diplomat attending WSIS and a Swiss diplomat personally hosted them at a nearby cafe. However, they had to leave when the cafe owner informed them that police surrounding the building said he would have to close it if they remained on the premises," said HRW in a news release.

Meanwhile, Pres. Ben Ali told the summit's opening that Tunisia is intent on "protecting human rights (and) protecting political pluralism... in harmony with the fundamental principles of the information society."

Iranian human rights lawyer and winner of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, Shirin Ebadi, raised a finger of righteous condemnation at the opening ceremony, which could have been directed at the host government. "Unfortunately, in some countries, human rights defenders, writers and translators are imprisoned; their only crime... having expressed their freedom of expression and opinion," she said.

Ghanian chief caught in drug ring

Special to Sentinel-Voice

A Ghanaian Minister of Parliament, considered a generous philanthropist at home, was caught up in a sting in Staten Island, N.Y., that netted 136 kilos of heroin, with a street value of more than \$6 million.

Minister Eric Amoateng, of the ruling New Patriotic

Party, was known for using his 'resources' to help his community of Nkoranza North in a variety of projects.

Supporters said he funded advanced study scholarships for over 80 students. During the 2004 elections, they said, he donated millions of dollars for the Domeabra Electrification Project, provided

bags of cement and roofing sheets for the construction of the just completed \$400-million-building with six classrooms, an office and a store in Bonte. Amoateng's farmlands are described as second to none in the area, as he harvests more than 3,000 bags of maize every year.

He was also reputed to plow people's farmlands for them, free of charge, with the recipient only providing fuel for the farm tractors.

Two weeks ago, Amoateng, along with another Ghanaian, Nii Okai Adjei, was captured at a Staten Island storage facility, dismantling crates containing the heroin, concealed in pottery products and alleged to have been sent from the

United Arab Emirates by way of Ghana.

A former New York State Prosecutor told a local radio station — Joy FM — that the minister and his alleged accomplice could be sentenced to life imprisonment and that the trial could take up to a year to complete. The two are being held without bail.

Ghana is increasingly a transit point for illegal drugs, particularly cocaine from South America and heroin from Southeast and Southwest Asia, according to the U.S. State Department's International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for 2005. Europe remains the major destination, but drugs also flow to South Africa and to North America.

Kenya hands President Kibaki a sound defeat

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Kenyan voters soundly defeated a new constitution that was seen as a test of the president's popularity.

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki conceded defeat recently in a live television address. "My government will respect the will of the people," he said.

Observers said it was a vote of no confidence in his three-year-old administration.

President Kibaki had campaigned hard for a 'yes' vote that would enact a ban on land ownership by foreigners; created Christian and other religious courts (Muslim courts already exist); banned same-sex marriages; outlawed abortion; banned regional parties, and created a position of Prime Minister. Women would have received equal rights to inherit property.

Kibaki had pledged to reduce the powers of the presidency by rewriting the current constitution, which dates back to Kenya's independence from Britain in 1963. But changes he put forward did not go as far as many would have liked.

Last week, on the streets of the capital, Nairobi, crowds of people celebrated the result, chanting "No, no, no," and some wearing orange — the color of the "No" campaign.

To help illiterate voters, the "No" team used images of oranges in their campaign literature. Images of bananas meant "Yes."

The 'yes' vote received wide support only in Central Province, home to many of Kibaki's Kikuyu community. Areas inhabited by Odinga's Luo and the Kalenjin of ex-President Daniel arap Moi overwhelmingly voted "No."

Opposition leader Uhuru Kenyatta praised Kenyans for rejecting "the monster of legalized dictatorship... The future of the country lies not in an imperial presidency but in accountable leadership." Minister Raila Odinga said: "These are historic days for our country."

LEGAL NOTICES

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice of Comment Period and Public Hearing on the Amendment to the

2004 Bicycle Pedestrian Element (BPE) of the Regional Transportation Plan for Fiscal Year 2004 - 2025

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC), serving as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Las Vegas Urban Area, is seeking public comment on a proposed amendment to the adopted Bicycle Pedestrian Element (BPE). In an effort to improve safety and the bicycle network, the RTC is recommending the following changes:

Adopt New Bicycle Route Segments:

- 1) Upland Blvd. - from Alta Dr. to Jones Blvd.
- 2) Jones Blvd. - from Upland Blvd. to Washington Ave.
- 3) Valley View Blvd. - from Bonanza Rd. to Washington Ave.
- 4) Pyramid Dr. - from Washington Ave. to Vegas Dr.
- 5) Valley Dr. - from Vegas Dr. to Smoke Ranch Rd.

Remove The Following Current Bicycle Route Segments:

- 1) Decatur Blvd. - Sahara Ave. to U.S. Hwy 95
- 2) Lindell Rd. (adopted bicycle lane) - Oakey to Charleston Blvd.
- 3) Jones Blvd. - Oakey to Charleston Blvd.
- 4) Charleston Blvd. - Tenaya Way to CC-215

Comment Period:

8:00 a.m. Monday, November 28, 2005 through 5:00 p.m. Monday, January 16, 2006

Public Hearing:

January 18, 2006, 4:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
RTC Administration Building, Room 108
600 S. Grand Central Parkway • Las Vegas, Nevada 89106

Submit Comments:

Attn: Maria Rodriguez
Fax: (702) 676-1518
Mail to: RTC of Southern Nevada
600 S. Grand Central Pkwy. • Las Vegas, NV 89106
Web site: www.rtcsonthernnevada.com
Questions: (702) 676-1500 • TDD: (702) 676-1834

The recommended BPE Amendment will be brought to the RTC at its regularly-scheduled meeting on February 9, 2006 at the Clark County Commission Chambers, 500 S. Grand Central Pkwy, Las Vegas, NV 89101 at 8:45 a.m.

Jacob Snow, General Manager
Regional Transportation Commission
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