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## REPORT

### Round Table on “Women in the Information Society: Building a Gender Balanced Knowledge-Based Economy”

16 November 2005  
3:00-5:00 p.m.

#### 1- Partner Organizations

- UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
- UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
- UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
- UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
- UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- UN Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (UN-ICT-TF)

#### 2- Summary

The Round Table was one of the parallel side events of the Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). It was jointly organized by the United Nations regional commissions, UNCTAD and the UN-ICT Task Force. The event was attended by over 100 participants from different regions, representing Governments, the private sector, NGOs and international organizations.

The discussions focused on national experiences and good practices in building a gender-sensitive Information Society. Progress was acknowledged in a number of countries with diverse development levels and experience, such as Finland, Jordan, Philippines and Slovenia. It was agreed, however, that a genderdigital divide is a fact across regions and that much remained to be done to fully integrate women into the Information Society. Laws ensuring women’s rights in the information society, programmes to increase women’s education and ICT skills, opening new employment opportunities were mentioned as key areas for further efforts. The Round Table concluded that it was time to act now using the follow-up to the WSIS process to raise awareness, build partnerships among stakeholders and promote cooperation between regions, while taking concrete measures to close the gender digital divide.

During the discussion, it was mentioned that the main WSIS outcome document, the Tunis agenda for the Information Society, are gender neutral; the gender aspects are referenced, mostly, through MDG and WSIS Geneva outcomes. Its part on financial mechanisms and implementation measures included only occasional reference to gender (paragraphs on building ICT capacity, training and education and gender disaggregated data). It was agreed that this view and the need of addressing gender issues in the follow-up process of WSIS should be communicated to the UN Secretary-General and the WSIS President on behalf of the participants of the Round Table.

### **3- Background**

Since gender equality is a key factor for socio-economic development, women's empowerment should be promoted. According to the Secretary-General's report "*In larger freedom*", "empowered women can be some of the most effective drivers of development".

ICT provide a main tool to reduce discrimination and to empower women for all type of activities, since the basic pillars of empowerment are information and the capacity to communicate and to engage in decision-making processes. The Beijing Declaration refers to ICT as "a powerful tool that women could use for mobilization, information exchange and empowerment". Moreover, ICT can contribute to increase primary and secondary education for girls, to ensure access to reproductive health services and to provide employment in the ICT and related sector.

However, women are taking less advantage than men of the process of building the Information Society and thus benefiting less. This is reflected in the lower numbers of women ICT users, producers and policy makers. Structural inequalities and the existence of gender-specific resource constraints, including income, time, educational bias and cultural factors appear to be responsible for this situation. In particular, family responsibilities and lower incomes leave women with less time and disposable income to access information technologies in particular outside their houses.

Policy makers will have to address numerous challenges in building the Information Society, including providing an adequate supply of human, financial and institutional resources. The gender dimension should, however, be part of this process from the outset. Policy makers have to recognize the need to build an inclusive Information Society, promoting the full and active participation of women and men from all walks of socio-economic life.

WSIS provides a useful framework for mainstreaming gender into the process of building an inclusive Information Society and Knowledge-Based Economy. The Declaration of Principles endorsed at the first phase of WSIS reaffirmed the enormous opportunities for women provided by recent developments in ICT, and also acknowledged the need to close the gender digital divide. The Declaration also underlined the role of women as equal partners to men in crafting the future Information Society. Full commitment to, and implementation of, these principles are necessary to ensure that ICT empowers women and leads to their full participation in the development process. This and other related issues should be a focus for the gender mainstreaming agenda and, across all regions, for the strategies for building the Information Society.

### **4- Summaries of Speakers' Interventions<sup>1</sup>**

#### **H. E. Ms. Nadia Alsaeed (*Chairperson*)**

Information and Communication Technology is an opportunity for women and young people in the Middle East as it helps them to improve the conditions of their life. It allows mobility and flexibility, which facilitates work from home or from a distance, which might suit the social condition of women in some Arab countries. ICT should contribute to the reform of the educational system and decision-making process.

Improving the rights of women in developing countries in general and in Middle East in particular, requires establishing laws, as well as raising awareness at all social and decision-making levels. In addition, ICT facilitates networking of different communities in the region and improves the interactions between people of different backgrounds. All the advantages of ICT should be exploited for the welfare of citizens, men and women.

In Jordan, many initiatives have been launched to empower women in rural areas, women at home or at work. E-village is one of these initiatives where special attention was given for women's empowerment.

#### **Ms. Mervat M. Tallawy, *ICT and Women: Two crossing themes in the ESCWA region***

Political unrest and military conflict in Western Asia have had grave implications on social and economic development in the region. This has exacerbated the problems of illiteracy and unemployment, and resulted in the proliferation of disadvantaged communities. Women, who suffer first and most under pressure, have

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<sup>1</sup> Speakers bionotes can be found in the Annex.

been suffering for a long time in this region. With high illiteracy rates, prevailing poverty and acute unemployment, very few will be able to participate in building the Information Society. This is especially so with the gender imbalance and where gender equality issues receive low national priority, in terms of equality legislation for improving women's position and allocating budgets for activities that would promote women's empowerment.

The use of ICT can help redress gender imbalances. ICTs and their policies could, among other things, help bridge the gender gap by promoting the establishment of women enterprises and improving their profitability, and by providing access to improved health services, for mother and child. Using ICTs and partnerships for development, and setting up ICT-based industries could be the means for changing the prevailing situation and for benefiting women as we move towards a global information-based economy. ESCWA is implementing pilot initiatives targeting disadvantaged communities, in order to empower women through ICT-based facilities.

The output of the second phase of the Summit, The Tunis agenda, does not include adequate references to women's needs or to their empowerment. This is of serious concern as the Tunis Agenda focuses on the implementation of WSIS principles adopted at the first phase of WSIS Geneva and includes financial mechanisms, part of which is the Digital Solidarity Fund launched during the Summit. This concern should be transmitted to the senior officials of the United Nations and to the WSIS Secretariat.

**Mr. Paolo Garonna, *ICT and Women: Focus on ECE region.***

Women in all 55 UNECE member countries are increasingly taking advantage of the process of building the Information Society. And ICT has especially great potential to become a tool for ensuring gender equality in this region as women are well educated and actively participate in the formal labour market. However, this potential remains untapped: women make up only between 10-12% of Internet users in a number of countries (such as in the Czech Republic and Lithuania). Even in the Nordic countries the gender gap in using the computer is between 10 and 15%.

Gender-specific barriers in equally sharing the benefits of the knowledge-based society include: high access costs, time constraints, lack of networks, cultural barriers, educational background, and limited access to training opportunities as well as cultural and social norms which also constitute significant barriers to ICT use for women. These barriers exist in all UNECE member States, but they are especially serious in countries with economies in transition in South Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Caucasus.

The UNECE supports the process of building a gender-balanced Knowledge-based Economy. It provides a regional platform for dialogue and mainstreaming gender into the discussion on ICT strategy and action plans at regional and sub-regional levels. It contributes to capacity-building in ICT for women entrepreneurs through the exchange of good practices, and the promotion of role models and supporting regional networks. It also develops methodologies and data collection in the gender and ICT area within its work programme on Gender Statistics. Strengthening cooperation with other regional commissions is of particular importance in the WSIS follow up process.

**Ms. Fatimata Sèye Sylla, *Gender and ICT challenges: opportunities & perspectives in Africa towards Information Society***

African's legal framework still includes sections that discriminate against women, and this discrimination stems from religious, social and cultural practices. Consequently significant disparities exist in government employment, education, formal and informal training.

Although, ICT today offers huge opportunities for transforming the path of development and for poverty eradication, statistics demonstrate that women and girls are at particular risk for exclusion from ICT opportunities. In African countries, research in six countries has shown that women have 1/3 less chance than men to profit from ICT.

Meanwhile, special attention is given to collecting information on the gender digital divide to focus on weak areas. Strategic partnerships between African IT entrepreneurs, women's organizations and business associations are under being established to bridge the gender digital divide. Several activities have been undertaken within UN system, at the governmental level or by private sector to empower women using ICT as tools for gender equality.

**Ms. Cynthia Romero Mamon, *Women empowerment and the role of female ICT leaders.***

The intervention focused on the role and responsibilities of female ICT leaders. Good practices and results of initiatives undertaken by the Sun Microsystems, Philippines, a successful ICT company, were presented in a broader context of the situation and key issues to improve women's access in South East Asia. The role of investment in women's education and special attention to women in rural areas was underlined. Power women, concluded Ms. Mamon, one of the women ICT leaders in the region, have special responsibility to help other women in understanding the benefits of ICT and improving their access to ICT.

**Ms. Barbara Barrett, *Bridging the digital gap between men and women.***

Four basic actions should be emphasized to bridge the digital gap between men and women and between developed and developing countries:

- To use the technology and to advocate its use in our everyday life;
- To show and demonstrate the benefits of ICT on our social and economic lives;
- To spread the use of technology and to establish good partnerships between the private sector and Governments;
- To upgrade the technology and to follow its progress.

**Professor Natasa Gospic, *Improving women's access to new technologies: A way forward.***

An intervention was made on behalf of Professor Gospic, which dealt with gender aspects in implementing ICT strategies, having in mind that whenever women were excluded from any movement or project this meant that the results were cut into half. The present situation in the SEE region was highlighted, with the focus on Serbia and Montenegro. Proposals for mechanisms to move forward, such as continuous monitoring and supervision of gender mainstreaming and awareness, a theoretical framework, media and civil sector projects were also indicated in order to achieve the ultimate goal in transforming women's access to new technologies, not merely focusing on access to knowledge but on the creation of knowledge itself.

#### **4- Recommendations**

The following recommendations could be formulated, based on the presentations and the discussion from the floor:

- Regional Commissions should promote sharing of experience and information on the empowerment of women through ICT between different countries and regions, and should establish partnership between Governments, NGOs and private sector, at all levels (local, national, regional and global) for the promotion of gender related social and economic growth;
- Regional Commissions should strengthen cooperation among themselves and with other UN agencies and international organizations to build synergies among various programmes and projects concerning empowerment of women's through ICT ;
- Regional Commissions and specialized agencies, such as UNIFEM should raise awareness on gender aspects of building the Information Society, particularly in the context of WSIS Tunis follow up, by launching awareness campaign at local, national and regional level;
- Governments and UNESCO should enhance educational systems by incorporating ICT and its applications in the educational curricula, with a gender balanced approach;
- Governments should strengthen women's position in the Information Society by ensuring equal rights for women and men in the legal framework, and maintaining gender equality in capacity building activities related to building the Information Society;
- All stakeholders should support the development of local content relevant to women's ICT needs in order to reach people in the lower socio-economic strata, including the illiterate, as recommended by the outcome document of the World Summit on Information Society (Tunis Commitment (paras. 14, 26) and Tunis agenda (paras. 15, 23, 26, 50, 53 and 90)).

- The Executive Secretary of ESCWA is requested to send a letter, on behalf of participants of the Round Table, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the ITU Secretary General and Secretary General of the Summit, reflecting concerns that the Tunis outcomes did not stress gender related aspects; and that the round table participants request more attention to the gender divide in the follow-up process of WSIS. Priority could be given to finance the implementation of gender mainstreamed development projects, development of content related to women issues, and improving women access to ICT.

## ANNEX

### Speakers Bionotes

#### Round Table on “Women in the Information Society: Building a Gender Balanced Knowledge-Based Economy”

16 November 2005

3:00 -5:00 PM

#### Speakers

Co-Chairpersons: H. E. Ms. Nadia Alsaeed, Representative of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah and Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Moderator: Ms. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point, Office of the Executive Secretary, UNECE

Panelists: Ms. Mervat M. Tallawy, Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)

Mr. Paolo Garonna, Officer-in-Charge, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Ms. Fatimata Sèye Sylla, Chairperson of Bokk Jang Bokk Jeff and Director of Digital Freedom Initiative, Senegal

Professor Natasa Gospic, Professor at the University of Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro, Chairperson of ITU Working Group on Gender Issues, and Board Member of Community of Yugoslav PTT

Ms. Cynthia Romero Mamon, President and Managing Director of Sun Microsystems Philippines, Inc.

Ms. Barbara Barrett, Corporate Board Member of Raytheon and Exponent, Inc., and Former President of the International Women’s Forum

**H. E. Nadia Hilmi Al-Saeed**  
**Minister of Information and Communications Technology- Jordan**

Nadia Hilmi Al-Saeed has served as Minister of Information and Communications Technology since October 2004 after having previously served as its Secretary General. As Secretary General, Ms. Al-Saeed supported the establishment of this young Ministry, and her responsibilities included the development of strategic action plans, department work plans and budgets, and effective performance monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that ensures that the Ministry institutionalizes as a Center of Excellence in governance. Ms. Al-Saeed also was responsible catalyzing the development of a vibrant information and communications technology [ICT] sector in Jordan.

Key accomplishments included the management of the development of the National ICT Policy and National ICT Strategy, as well as the Ministry's strategic programs and action plan. Ms. Al-Saeed also led an internal transformation of the Ministry, including empowerment of existing staff through capacity development, introduction of internal management systems and processes aimed at best practice, performance monitoring and development, and the introduction of technology as a key ingredient to enhanced productivity and transparency. Included was the successful deployment of a Ministry wide government resource planning system.

Ms. Al-Saeed graduated with a Masters in Business Administration from the American University in Cairo, following a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration and Economics from the University of Jordan, where she graduated first in her class. Ms. Al-Saeed was also elected to join the "Potential Leadership" program under the patronage of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal during her undergraduate studies.

**Mervat Tallawy**  
**Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations**  
**Executive Secretary of ESCWA**

In November 2000, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Mrs. Mervat Tallawy of Egypt as Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) at the level of Under-Secretary-General. Mrs. Tallawy was appointed at the head of ESCWA following a 38-year distinguished career in foreign affairs, international relations and public service. Prior to her appointment, Mrs. Tallawy was the Secretary-General of the National Council for Women in Egypt (2000-2001) and Minister of Insurance and Social Affairs from (1997-1999). She was the first woman in the Egyptian diplomatic body to be appointed at the level of ambassador and head of mission (1987). During her riveting diplomatic career, Mrs. Tallawy served as Ambassador of Egypt to Japan (1993-1997); Deputy Foreign Minister (1991-1993); Head of the Egyptian Delegation to the Multilateral Negotiations on Regional Economic Cooperation following the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference (1991-1993); and Ambassador of Egypt to Austria (1988-1991).

In the 1960s and the 1970s, Mrs. Tallawy served Egypt in different diplomatic functions as Ambassador Plenipotentiary and Counsellor in the Permanent Missions of Egypt to the United Nations in New York and Geneva as well as in several departments of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs particularly concerned with political and technical affairs, and international organizations.

In her diverse international experience, Mrs. Tallawy focused on human rights, development, population and gender issues as well as on other fields such as economic development, drug control, environment and natural disaster reduction. She has participated in all United Nations conferences on women, from the Mexico Conference in 1975 to the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing + 5) in 2000. In her focus on human rights and the status of women, she chaired both the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1991-1993), as well as the Working Group on the Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1992) and the United Nations Meeting of all Human Rights Treaty Bodies (Geneva, 1992).

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**Paolo Garonna**  
**Officer-in- Charge of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

Paolo Garonna is currently Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva. He has been Deputy Executive Secretary of the same organisation from March 2001 to October 2003.

From 2003 to 2005 he was Chief Economist and Director of Research at Confindustria, the main private sector employers' organisation in Italy.

Also he was Professor of Applied Economics at the Faculty of Political Science of the University LUISS G.Carli of Rome and at the Faculty of Statistics of the University of Padova in Italy, where he moved up the academic ladder from lecturer to Associate Professor and full Professor.

In the 1990's, Mr. Garonna was Head of the National Statistical Institute of Italy (ISTAT). He joined the United Nations in 1999 as Director of the Statistical Division of the UNECE in Geneva.

Before then, he worked at the OECD in Paris from 1988 to 1992 as Deputy Director for Employment Education and Social Affairs.

From November 2001 to March 2002 he was Acting Executive Secretary of the UNECE.

Author of many books and articles on economic policies, labour and business economics, science and technology, and statistics, Mr Garonna was economic advisor to many Governments, business- civil society- and international organisations. He served as Vice-President of the ECOFIN Committee of UNICE, the employers' association of the EU, based in Brussels. In the 1990's he was Chairman of the UN Conference of European Statisticians.

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**Cynthia Romero Mamon**  
**President and Managing Director Sun Microsystems Philippines, Inc**

Cynthia Romero Mamon is currently President and Managing Director of Sun Microsystems Philippines Inc.

A dynamic leader and dedicated worker, Ms. Mammon earned her master degree in Agribusiness management in 1976 as a Phillipine Council for Agricultural Resources and Research Development (PCCARD) scholar at UP Diliman. She earned her certificate in the Information Systems Specialist programme at the George Washington University in Washington. DC, USA. She has received several awards, most prominent of which are one of the Eight Leading IT Executives (ELITE) given by the Unix Users Club of the Phhilippines in 1994 and the 2001 Outstanding professional in the Field of IT conferred by the UP Alumni Association in June 2001.

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**Natasa Gospic**  
**Professor at the University of Belgrade**

Natasa Gospic obtained a B.Sc and a M.Sc. degrees from the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, and a Ph.D degree from the Faculty of Transport and Traffic Engineering, at the University of Belgrade. She worked for 15 years as Assistant General Director of Community at the Yugoslav PTT. She later became Acting General Manager of the mobile operator MONET in Montenegro. She was Advisor to the General Manager of Telecom Srpske before she became Assistant Professor at the Universities of Banja Luka and Belgrade.

Gospic has been recruited by the ITU and UNDP as a consultant. She has edited the ITU Handbook "New technologies and new services". She has acted as the chairperson of World Global Gender Institute (WGGI) since 2002 and chaired the Task Force on Gender

Issues (2000-2002). She is president of the NGO Equal Opportunities (Serbia) and is the author of three books and more than 50 scientific and technical papers.

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**Barbara Barrett**  
**Corporate Board Member of Raytheon and Exponent**

Barbara Barrett has been involved in international business and aviation for over 25 years. Before she was 30 she was an officer and executive of two Fortune 500 companies. Throughout her career, Mrs. Barrett has applied her legal and business experience as President and CEO of a multimillion-dollar business and on the boards of companies - from small start-ups to multibillion-dollar global giants. Today she serves on the corporate boards of Raytheon and Exponent, Inc. and was the founding Chairman of the Board of Valley Bank of Arizona.

In the 1980's, Mrs. Barrett became Vice Chairman of the United States Civil Aeronautics Board where she negotiated aviation agreements with Great Britain, China, Poland, Ireland, Peru, the Philippines, Jamaica and many other countries. Later, as the first woman Deputy Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), she worked on technical aviation matters with U.S. and worldwide aviation leaders. Today she is Chairman of the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy and a member of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.

During the 1990's, Mrs. Barrett served as President and CEO of the American Management Association, a \$300 million worldwide management enterprise headquartered in New York City. Later, she was a teaching Fellow at Harvard University's Institute of Politics.

In addition to being the immediate past Chairman of the Board of Thunderbird, The Garvin School of International Management, she is a member of the Senior Advisory Board at Harvard's Kennedy School, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York and a member of the boards of the Center for International Private Enterprise, The Freedom House and Global Center for Dispute Resolution. She served on the President's Advisory Committee on Trade Negotiations and for seven years was Chairman of the Arizona District Export Council. In 2001 she completed her two-year term as President of the International Women's Forum, a 3,500-member global organization of top women achievers.

**Ewa Ruminska-Zimny**  
**Senior Social Affairs Officer**  
**Gender Focal Point of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)**

Since 2001 Ewa Ruminska-Zimny is senior social affairs officer at the Office of The Executive Secretary of UNECE and the Gender Focal Point of the organization. She has PhD in international economics from the Warsaw School of Economics, Poland, where she moved up the academic ladder from lecturer to Associate Professor.

Since 1989 she has been working with the United Nations as economist (UN DESA), senior economist (UNDP Human Development Report Office), consultant for the Beijing Conference for UNECE and UNDP and co-ordinator of projects in eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

At UNECE she developed gender and economy programme to promote mainstreaming gender into macroeconomic and sectoral policies, including SMEs development and ITC. Particular attention is given to central Asia and the Caucasus within the UN Special Programme for central Asia (SPECAs) supported by UNECE and UNESCAP. She is also responsible for promoting a regional dialogue on the follow up to the Beijing Conference and on gender aspects of other UN global conferences, such the World Summit on MDG and the WSIS process [www.unece.org/oes/gender](http://www.unece.org/oes/gender). She is the author of a number of papers and publications related to human development and gender issues, including *Access to financing and ICT for women entrepreneurs (UNECE 2004)*.

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