

UNESCWA Press Release

The Second Regional Preparatory Conference for the World Summit on the Information Society - Tunis 2005

The Second Regional Preparatory Conference for the World Summit on the Information Society – Tunis 2005 is scheduled to start at the Umayyad Congress Palace, Damascus, on Monday 22 November 2004. The conference launches the regional preparations for the second phase of WSIS in Tunis slated for 16-18 November 2005.

The two-day conference is held under the auspices of H.E. Mohammad Naji Otri, the Prime Minister of the Arab Republic of Syria. The conference is organized jointly by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization - Cairo Office, and the Arab Republic of Syria Ministry of Communications and Technology.

The conference aims at forming a partnership for building a sustainable Arab information society. A Regional Plan of Action is presented in the conference. The RPOA is based on the Arab Strategy for Communications and Information, adopted by the Arab Summit in Amman (March 2001) and the global POA adopted in the first WSIS Summit in Geneva (December 2003).

The RPOA outlines how the global and regional strategies can be utilized to stimulate change at the regional and national levels. It includes nine [9] programmes with thirty [30] projects that cover building regional cyber hubs for development, empowering Arab NGOs in the information society, information society measurements, and promoting the digital Arabic content, among others. The projects are submitted from many Arab countries, regional entities, international organizations, and multinational corporations.

The conference is preceded with a Partners Forum where partnerships of beneficiaries and potential donors can be formed for implementing these projects.

Meetings by the Arab Working Group on the WSIS and the Executive Bureau of the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers follow during 24-26 November 2005.

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A Partners Forum immediately preceding the conference kicks-off its activities in high gear. The PF's objective is to bring beneficiaries and potential donors together to form partnerships aimed at implementing the projects in the Regional Plan of Action submitted to the conference.

The conference opens with a plenary session chaired by H.E. Dr. Bachir Al-Mounajed, the Arab Republic of Syria Minister of Communications and Technology. The session includes opening statements from the conference organizers, international partners of the WSIS, and several ministerial statements on national perspectives and plans.

The conference is organized jointly by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization - Cairo Office, and the Arab Republic of Syria Ministry of Communications and Technology. Ministers of information and communication technology from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Sudan, and Mauritania are expected to attend the conference.

A follow-up plenary session is set-up to present the RPOA and visionary speeches and commentaries by a panel of leading Arab and international figures. During the two-day conference, fifty-three [53] presentations on civil society, women issues, socioeconomic applications, ICT strategies, digital Arabic content, and UNESCO knowledge communities, among others, are given in twelve [12] sessions over three [3] parallel tracks on thematic issues, national/regional/global perspectives, and knowledge.

The conference is followed with the second meeting of the UNESCWA Consultative Committee on Science, Technology, and Innovation to consider the outcomes of the conference and establishing a Western Asia Bureau for the WSIS.