Statement by Mr. Muhammad Hassan, First Secretary on Agenda Item 92 (c) – ICT for Development in 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (December 08, 2003)

Mr. President,

During the last two decades, the global economy has gone through fundamental changes. The process of globalization, driven by trade liberalization and technological innovations, has radically changed the paradigms in almost every domain of human activities. It has shifted the world of distinct national economies to a global economy. Tremendous advancement in science and technology especially in the field of ICT have expanded the network of transnational linkages and the digital and information revolution has provided historic opportunity for developing countries to take a quantum leap forward and integrate into the global economy.

2. Paradoxically, this process of global economic and technological development has also brought about the uneven distribution of benefits, thereby accentuating global economic polarization. As a result of dramatic advancement of modern technology, the digital divide has further accentuated, and the income and development gap between the developed, developing countries has further widened and the benefit of the technological explosion has not reached to the poor. Consequently, technology, concentrated in the hands of a few firms in a few countries has exposed the rest of the world to technical dependence and monopolistic pricing. The technological revolution has, in fact, magnified the socio-economic disparities and divides.

3. Nevertheless, there is a broad consensus that technology, especially the ICT is the way of the future. With universal access it can serve as the engine of economic growth and development. The challenge is how to ensure that the technological revolution, particularly the ICT, benefits every inhabitant of the world.

Mr. President,

4. One can not deny the fact that to manage globalization and make technology work for the poor, the international community needs to adopt a holistic, progressive, and participatory approach - an approach that ensures the utilization of technology towards the development needs of the developing countries and poverty eradication. An important pre-requisite for attaining this objective will be the provision of an enabling international environment supportive of development. Transfer of technology to developing countries should be an important element of this approach. With a billion on the planet living in absolute poverty and a great majority untouched by the new gadgets; it will be meaningless to mention about the benefits of this revolution. Moreover, physical access to information technology will be meaningless to those who have no means to pay for it. Investment in basic literacy, infrastructure and human resource development would therefore be essential for making ICT work for the development of the poor communities.

Mr. President,

5. The United Nations is well placed to lead the world in placing science and technology in the service of development. By building partnerships with all relevant actors, United Nations can lead the way in promoting the development objectives of developing countries. In this regard, we feel that the establishment of United Nations ICT Task Force was a timely step in the right direction. There is need to give full support to this UN initiative. On our part, Pakistan fully supports its programmes and activities and hope that the Task Force would continue to support the United Nations membership in their efforts to make ICT work for their development.
6. The holding of the first phase of the World Summit on Information Society in Geneva this week is yet another important step. The Prime Minister of Pakistan Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali will lead the Pakistan delegation to the Geneva Summit. We look forward for a successful outcome of this phase, as well as of its second phase to be held in Tunisia in the year 2005. Pakistan has actively participated in its preparatory process and would continue to lend our full support to both the phases of the Summit.

7. We also believe that strengthening the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology by improving its efficiency and effectiveness is an imperative. We need to empower ESOCOC and its affiliated bodies dealing with Science and Technology to strengthen the capacities of the developing countries, in order to enable them to reap the fruits of ICT revolution.

Mr. President,

8. On our part, the Government of Pakistan has adopted a holistic, progressive, participatory and an all encompassing approach to the promotion of Information and Communication Technology in our country. A National Commission for Science and Technology headed by the President of Pakistan has been established. A proposal to establish an advisory body to examine ways and means to develop those areas of science and technology which are directly related to economic development and national security are also under consideration. An all out effort for the strengthening of the science base in the country is being made. For this, synergy between the Ministries of Education and Science and Technology is being created. To achieve this target, Government of Pakistan is concentrating on upgradation of infrastructure in research and development organizations and institutes, as well as on technology development, creating linkages between industry and academia and development of an extensive pool of human resources in key areas of science and technology.

9. A vibrant national Information Technology policy has been launched. Our IT policy is aimed at;

- The realization of the role of the government as a facilitator and an enabler;
- The development of an extensive pool of skilled IT workforce;
- To provide business incentives for both local and foreign investors;
- Designing of legislative and regulatory frameworks which are conducive to the promotion of IT industry as the engine of development; and;
- Establishment of an efficient and cost-effective infrastructure that provides affordable and wide-spread connectivity as well as equitable access to networks;

10. Pakistan is also actively seeking foreign investment in the sectors of telecommunications and software development. A liberal investment environment which includes 100% foreign ownership of companies, repatriation of profits, favourable legislations is being offered. This coupled with an intelligent, motivated and young IT human resource provides conducive conditions for foreign investment. The Government is also encouraging joint-ventures in IT industry in Pakistan.

11. Pakistan, like many other developing countries, has endeavored to strategically place itself so that it could benefit from the immense potential of information and telecommunication technology. These policies and efforts are highly unlikely to yield the desired results without a commensurate international effort to place ICT in the service of development.

I thank you, Mr. President.