

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Positions for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

I. Bridging the Digital Divide Among Member States

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strongly recognizes the importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in order to build a prosperous and fair global information society (IS) that reflects national and regional cultural identities. As we witness the dawn of a globalized IS, the proliferation of ICTs is creating a digital divide that aggravates traditional inequalities between rural and urban areas, rich and poor, women and men. **Internationally**, Saudi Arabia deplores the growing disparities within the international community. Saudi Arabia supports the idea that ICTs can become digital opportunities as stated in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Declaration of Principles (DoP) Article 10. This is especially true when ICTs are used in an educational and entrepreneurial framework to expand current laissez-faire policies. Saudi Arabia supports resolutions A/RES/56/258, A/RES/58/167 on promoting equal and fair representation in the Internet, and A/RES/57/239 on the creation of a global culture of cyber-security. Saudi Arabia acknowledges the United Nations Charter Article 1.1 to ensure the affectivity of resolutions on transparency and action against cyber-terrorism. Saudi Arabia affirms that a clear and internationally accepted definition of transparency is indispensable, and that establishing electronic transparency policies on a solid normative and moral basis is vital for the creation of a feasible system of adequate public participations. Saudi Arabia firmly supports the WSIS Plan of Action (PoA), specifically Article 3 which calls for regional partnerships. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an active member of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and strives to turn the Arab world into an integral part of the global IS. Saudi Arabia's commitment has been appreciated with the election of a Saudi as Vice President to the Preparatory Commission I (PrepCom) for the Tunis phase. Saudi Arabia supports the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, specifically Article 26 sub-clause 2 which states that misunderstandings about cultural values are the root cause of a variety of international problems and have to be combated in order to promote a dialogue between all cultures. Saudi Arabia affirms the Geneva Declaration by the Global Forum on Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society which discusses gaining profit from introducing these rights as well as subsequent diversification of the digital community. **Regionally**, Saudi Arabia recognizes the low Internet connectivity rates in the Arab region and places special emphasis on the use of wireless networks and satellite broadband connections. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has introduced the Saudi Centre for Remote Sensing which provides know-how to Arab nations. Saudi Arabia also supports the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, specifically Article 13 calling for enhanced human capacity building. **Nationally**, Saudi Arabia stands by its Constitution, especially Chapter 4 Article 22 which expresses that economic and social development will be achieved with a just and scientific plan, as well as Chapter 5 Article 29 safeguarding science, literature, and culture, while encouraging scientific research and protecting the Arab, Islamic, and human civilization. Saudi Arabia has promulgated a comprehensive *National Plan for Science and Technology*, which coordinates and strengthens education as well as research, development, and private investments. Saudi Arabia shares its hopes of bridging the digital divide by 2020. To achieve this end on an international scale, Saudi Arabia calls upon developing nations to improve their ICT-infrastructure and to further strengthen regional cooperation. Saudi Arabia recognizes the necessity to strengthen capacity building and education, inter alia, by training ICT-specialists. In this regard, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) projects like the *Information for All Programme* (IFAP) is a valuable partner. Saudi Arabia reminds all nations that the *Education for All* (EFA) *gender parity goals* set by the EFA Forum in Dakar in 2000 have to be fulfilled until the end of 2005, a goal already met by Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi Arabia, therefore, deems the *Digital Solidarity Fund* as indispensable as demanded by the DoP Art. 61. The Fund would substitute the variety of existing financial mechanisms. As one of the leading contributors to official development aid, Saudi Arabia has given 5.4 per cent of its Gross National Product to developing countries and calls on all nations to contribute likewise and to achieve the 0.7% demanded not only by the *Monterrey Consensus*. Hence, **DOT-COM** is the action plan that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will promulgate during the conference. It will focus upon the **Delivering** and **Operationalizing Technology** to the **Commons**.

II. Establishing Best Practices for Primary Education in Math and the Sciences

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognizes that everyone is entitled to universal primary education. Saudi Arabia is actively working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). **Internationally**, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia signed onto the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of a Child. A/RES/55/2 states "To ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education". **Regionally**, the Arab States signed onto the Cairo Declaration adopted by the Regional Conference on Education for All Arab States in 2000. Its main focus is on improving the quality of education for both quantitative and qualitative levels. All Arab states belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) statistically gave an average of 4.2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on public education. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has given an average of 6.9% making it the state that has given more in public education than any other GCC Arab country in the region. Collectively as a region, the Arab States have increased their enrollment and completion of primary schools. GCC states have increased their primary completion rate from 91.5% on 2000/2001 to 95% on 2004/2005, showing that students are completing primary school. The

Primary net enrolment rate has increased from 80.8% to 93.5%, from 1990-2005. **Nationally**, the Ministry of Education regulates educational policy on primary education for boys. Girl's education is handled by a separate agency called the General Presidency of Girls Education established in 1960. Based on the 35th International Conference on Education in 1968, Saudi Arabia responded to compulsory education by adopting, a uniform educational policy in cooperation with other Arab states for a six-year compulsory elementary education. As a nation, Saudi Arabia is implementing separate equal schools, free education, compulsory until elementary and this has allowed for an increase amount of student's completing primary education, as stated by statistics of the GCC. In 2003, Saudi Arabia participated in an international quantitative study, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), indicating that participating Arab states were below the international average of both mathematics and science. In response in 2004, the Ministry of Education set up an ambitious 10 year comprehensive plan that covers all levels of education. At the same time, the Ministry of Education launched a 267 million USD program to upgrade the mathematic and science standards in the nation. By the year 2012, there will be a set number of teachers and supervisors trained in modern teaching techniques. As a nation, Saudi Arabia, has given a greater share of its GDP to education, offering education for each gender, free education and is implementing plans to increase teaching standards. Saudi Arabia has developed a three point action plan titled **D.A.L.**, the Arabic word for Read: **Devote** more time in the classroom for technology with assistance of organizations such as the Global Education Initiative (GEI), which utilizes skills in technology working with a global sector to improve school achievement; **Advocate** Member States to partake in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) or TIMSS; taking part on either of these qualitative or quantitative measures will ensure student achievement, particularly in Mathematics and Science; and, **Launch** training sessions and workshops on all educational levels, with assistance from organizations such as University Twinning and Networking (UNITWIN) which according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it has "proven useful in establishing new teaching programmes, generating new ideas through research and reflection, and facilitating the enrichment of existing university programmes while respecting cultural diversity."

III. Utilizing the Culture of Peace to Prevent Conflict

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strongly backs the Culture of Peace created by General Assembly Resolution A/RES/52/13 which is the first to call for a "transformation from a culture of war and violence to a culture of peace and non-violence". **Internationally**, Saudi Arabia supports the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World enacted in 2001-2010. Its focus is on implementation of a culture of peace at the local, national, regional and international levels as well as to ensure that governments will be world leaders. Saudi Arabia reaffirms A/RES/53/243, the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, which focuses on eight areas: education, equality of women, democratic participation, sustainable development, human rights, understanding, tolerance, solidarity, free flow of information and knowledge, along with international peace and security. **Regionally**, the World Economic Forum's Global Education Initiative (GEI) introduced Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) into the national education systems of several Arab countries, impacting over 1.8 million students and teachers and mobilized over 100 million USD in resource support in the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, and the Palestinian Territories among others. The GEI's focus is on bringing ICTs to Arab states in order for students to utilize their skills in technology, working with a global sector and to improve school achievement. In 2005, 6.5% of the Arab population was using the Internet compared to 0.9% in 2000, showing that the region is developing at a steady pace. **Nationally**, Saudi Arabia is implementing educational programs, collaborating with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) all to achieve the culture of peace, to get to the root of the misunderstandings that cause conflict. Saudi Arabia and The Institute for Civic Leadership joined forces in forming a non-political relationship between U.S. and Saudi students to forge peace education programs and bridge the gap between the United States of America and the Middle East with the goal being to foster world peace and cultural understanding. Saudi Arabia worked with UNESCO, in order to establish an initiative titled "Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Programme for a Culture of Peace and Dialogue." Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Bin Mohammed Al Saud, Minister of Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, has contributed 5 million USD for the initiative in order to develop "programmes and events to spread a culture of peace and dialogue as well as tolerance in Member States". Thus, Saudi Arabia is the largest emerging donor in education and a major actor in advancing towards Millennium Development Goal Two of Achieving Universal Education by its target year of 2015. Saudi Arabia has developed a four point action plan titled **M.E.N.A.**, the Arabic word for Prevent: **Mobilize** international aid towards implementing information and communication technologies in developing states, with the assistance of the GEI; **Empower** Member States to develop the capacity and programs to meet the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goals 1 and 2; **Negotiate** regional security cooperation and arms reduction agreements to foster collaboration and compromise rather than conflict among neighboring states; and, **Advocate** greater tolerance of cultural differences through education systems.