Foreword

In March of 1994 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Vice President Al Gore gave the keynote address at the first World Telecommunication Development Conference of the Geneva-based International Telecommunication Union. There, he challenged the delegates to build and operate a global information infrastructure (GII) that would connect all people of the world. He laid out the 5 principles in the Administration's plan for creating this GII: encouraging private investment; promoting competition; creating a flexible regulatory framework; providing open access to the network; and most importantly, ensuring universal service.

Four years later, I had the pleasure and privilege of addressing the second World Telecommunication Development Conference held in Valletta, Malta. This was my first opportunity as Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission to speak to the international community and it was fitting to begin this aspect of my chairmanship by expressing my long-held intention to address the telecom issues of developing countries. In Malta, I spoke about ways to achieve our common goal - universal access and, ultimately, universal service - and our common commitment to build an information community that is truly global in its reach. As I noted that morning, the work that we do in concert with the development community, perhaps more than any other work I will do as Chairman of the FCC, holds the promise of bringing the world together as a community connected by technology.

Vice President Gore's vision was - and is - to connect the world through a global information infrastructure that knows no geographic, language or time boundaries. I share this vision. Through the FCC's development initiative, I hope to take concrete steps toward advancing the GII. This vision is also inspired by my late father, who spent his life as an architect building communities for people in the United States. And just as I can point with pride to the buildings that my father built in his time, I hope that this initiative will provide stepping stones for future generations around the globe to point with pride to the networks and communities that we build in our time.

Constructing the GII is an urgent task. All nations have the basic right to harness technologies to allow their economies to grow and flourish. We in the United States have a shared responsibility to assist nations in achieving that goal. This is hardly a new concept. From the time following WWII, the United States has worked with others to build the international community – whether it was the Marshall Plan in Western Europe, a major trade relationship with Korea and Japan, or the Alliance for Progress in Latin America. Now, more than ever, no country – not the United States nor any other – can hope to prosper in the information age by shutting itself off from the rest of the world, by hoarding technological know-how or by thinking that its concerns end at its borders.

As we enter the 21st century, cross the digital frontier and venture deeper into the digital age, our long-standing global commitment must be redoubled. And it should not be focused just on the sites of yesterday's wars, or even just on our past partners, but on the sites of tomorrow's promise.

The Africa Initiative

Connecting the Globe: The Africa Initiative is the first in a four-volume series that will chronicle the FCC's efforts to focus on these new areas of promise: the developing world. Succeeding volumes will cover Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Central Europe.

I chose to begin this initiative in Africa because it is the next great frontier in the information revolution. The challenge to achieve universal access in Africa is most urgent. Courageously implementing the right regulatory policies in Africa will transform the lives of a great number of people – a people who could risk losing their place in the global information society if these challenges are not met. Moreover, since one in every eight people on our planet lives in Africa, it is clear that there cannot be a truly global information infrastructure without an African Information Infrastructure (AII).

We have entered a new era in American-African relations – an era that recognizes the promise of this continent and the realities of the global economy. That is why in 1998, President Clinton made his historic trip to Africa – the first of any American president – so that he could see what America can learn from Africa and how we can work with Africa as partners to build a better future for all our children. And it is why in March of last year in Washington, D.C., the President, Secretary of State, eight other Cabinet members, two agency heads and I, as FCC Chairman, joined 83 ministers from 46 African nations in the first USA-Africa Ministerial. The purpose of this historic meeting – to draw a blueprint for American-African relations in the 21st century – was accomplished. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's trip to Africa in October 1999 – her third since becoming Secretary of State – continues to highlight the partnership America has built with Africa over the past several years and demonstrates our country's commitment to accelerate Africa's integration into the global economy.

These are but the first steps toward a sustained, strong partnership with the people of Africa, a partnership based on shared ideals and mutual respect, a partnership that can help strengthen both the United States and the countries of Africa.

I believe that Africa is a rich continent, not just rich in mineral and agricultural resources, but, as Kwame Nkrumah pointed out in his 1961 book *I Speak of Freedom*, rich with people full of hard work and innovative ideas. And Africa is increasingly becoming an important export market for the United States, a market on which over 100,000 American jobs rely**.**

Back at AFCOM '98, I pledged to work in partnership with Africa to advance the AII. Last June, at AFCOM '99, I began this development initiative because I want to see an Africa that has its markets, businesspeople, teachers, doctors, students, and children linked together and connected to the entire community of nations.   As Nelson Mandela noted when he spoke at ITU Africa '98, "Africa remains a huge, untapped market for telecommunications and information technologies. Like other emerging markets, it presents huge opportunities for investors." He also spoke of his vision for a public-private partnership that, through communications technology, would make access to basic health services for every African a reality, a partnership that would give millions of Africans access to global markets, a partnership that would help fuel the African Renaissance.

Although Africa has its fair share of challenges, it is poised to take advantage of the information revolution. Throughout Africa, tangible steps are being taken by African leadership to ensure that the AII moves forward. Many African nations have created, or are in the process of creating, national policies on telecommunications and information.   A number have adopted new and transparent telecommunications laws and regulations. Most permit competition in cellular and value added services. Many have liberalized, privatized, and created independent regulatory bodies, and a growing number permit competition in basic telecommunications services.

African regulators too have formed regional associations, like the Telecommunications Regulators Association of Southern Africa (TRASA) to share knowledge and experience, and to expand telecommunications in Africa. Already, model legislation adopted by this organization is guiding telecom reform in the southern region. Real progress is being made because decision-makers are pooling their collective resources to work together toward common goals. These partnerships are, and will continue to be, pivotal in building the AII.

A Framework for Promoting Universal Access

The ability of individuals, communities, and nations to participate in the global community increasingly will be shaped by telecommunications policy.   This initiative seeks to share the best lessons the FCC has learned in this area, so that, where applicable, others can avoid our mistakes, and replicate, or even surpass, our successes.

This initiative is not about exporting old or ill-fitted ideas or regimes. It is about working cooperatively with those around the globe to share the best ideas and policies that will result in universal access to telecommunications for all people. The number one priority for developing countries in terms of telecommunications

is attaining universal access. Whether the goal is a telephone in every home or access to communications within a reasonable distance for everyone, such access is critical to improving the social and economic potential of residents of the developing world, and reducing the income gap that currently exists between developed and developing countries. I firmly believe that this goal can best be attained through privatization, liberalization, competition, and transparent regulatory regimes administered by a strong, independent regulator.

The challenge to telecom policy makers and regulators is like no other in history. We will be judged on the basis of whether we had the courage to make the tough decisions required to usher in this new information era. I believe that we can succeed. In fact, evidence of ongoing efforts in this direction is increasingly apparent.

For example, in the last few months, regulators from Uganda have met with me in Washington, D.C. to discuss telecommunications issues of common interest. Follow-up meetings recently were held in Uganda between these officials and FCC International Bureau staff.   We have had similar discussions here and abroad with telecommunications regulators from South Africa and Ghana. I am encouraged by the increasingly forward-looking regulatory efforts currently underway in these countries.

Similarly, during my 11-day journey to Southern Africa, I addressed and had discussions with several representatives from member nations of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a region with a population of 187 million and a GDP of roughly $180 billion. I had further discussions with elected officials, telecom and broadcasting regulators, community broadcasters, local journalists, the U.S. and South African private sector, and users and consumers of telecom services in this region.

I am encouraged by the potential of what I saw and heard - from the budding regulatory efforts of the TRASA countries to establish more open and competitive markets - to the wireless communications networks operating in places like Lusaka and Alexandra - to the long distance satellite training in Soshanguve - to the community radio stations licensed in Soweto, Cape Town, and other communities.

I look forward to our role as regulatory players on the world stage in working diligently in partnership with other world players to connect the globe.
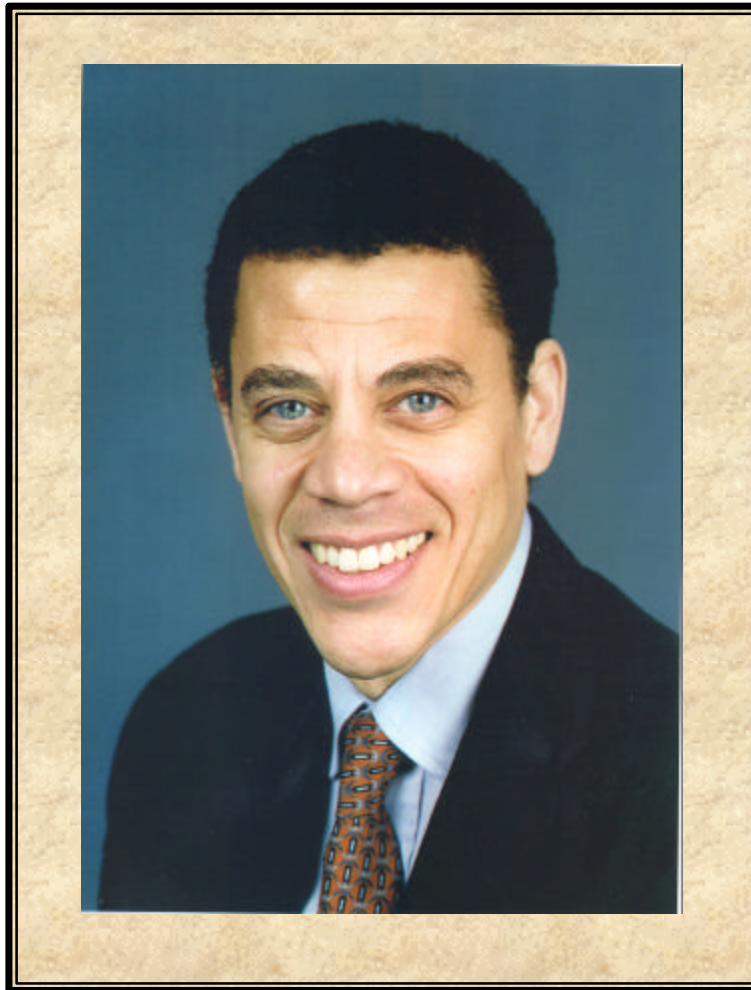
William E. Kennard
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
Washington DC
January 2000