

**GLOBAL FORUM 2005**  
**Opening Session**

**ANDRE SANTINI**

Mr President of the European Commission,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Madame Commissioner,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I would like to sincerely thank the organizers of the Global Forum 2005 for inviting me to participate in this opening session. Representing the Global Cities Dialogue network in such a distinguished panel of speakers is both an honour and an important signal to local governments.

The debates during the coming two days of the Global Forum aim at taking stock of the current state of technological convergence. However, beyond all these technical aspects, there is one main question politicians are facing today: How to enable our citizens to easily access the various contents - including texts, images and sound - made possible by this convergence?

As you all know, technologies are changing very quickly. And even you – the experts - might have difficulties in following this rapid evolution. Imagine then, the great confusion citizens feel in face of this technological jungle interspersed with incomprehensible – or should I say barbarous? – words!

Our duty as politicians is to anticipate evolution in order to prepare the population to future developments. But our duty is also to understand what is at stake and to simply explain what this signifies for our fellow citizens.

In order to understand, we have to share experience. And this is the reason why 180 mayors, from all over the world, band together within the "Global Cities Dialogue". The Global Cities Dialogue is an international network and a platform for discussions which was founded six years ago with the encouragement of the European Commission.

We are not yet another organisation joining the variety of city networks and associations already existing nowadays. We do not have any financial commitments. Our only engagement is to formally sign the Helsinki Declaration "Mayors of the World for a Global Cities Dialogue", and to commit ourselves to the promotion of an Information Society for All.

We, the mayors of the Global Cities Dialogue, believe that, at present, cities are the most pertinent level for developing new applications for information and communication technologies.

Cities are geographic, political, socio-economic and cultural entities, where millions of people live, work, exercise and enjoy their rights as citizens and consumers.

In this global world symbolised by the Internet, we believe more than ever in this concept of close proximity.

The worldwide dialogue between mayors on the Information Society also allows us to remind that the most innovating experiences have been realised in our local territories and often on our own initiative.

It is this totality of experiences that we would like to make available to national governments, to the European Commission and to every national and international organisation, as a way to avoid repeating mistakes and to provide a solid basis of work.

Our dialogue is not only among cities. We also have partnerships with other organizations, such as:

- the Global Business Dialogue on e-Commerce,
- the Network of Local Authorities for the Information Society,

- the European Knowledge Society Forum – TeleCities,
- or the RED Iberoamericana de Ciudades Digitales.

These partnerships help us to better evaluate the main evolutions affecting our citizens in a local Information Society.

This is also the reason why we are an important partner of the second World Summit of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society which will take place in Bilbao in two days, just after the Global Forum. It is of major importance for us to convince the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, that we are able to concretely contribute to the building of a new society and the fight against the digital divide.

Thus, convergence is also about the convergence of ideas, about the convergence of practices and about the convergence of methods.

I am just coming back from Asia where I signed a twinning agreement with the district of Guro in Seoul, which currently holds the vice presidency of the Global Cities Dialogue in Asia. I was able to discuss the future of television via mobile phones as well as the various services offered to the users.

In Japan, I met the mayor of the city of Mitaka, who won the first place in this year's ranking of the top seven intelligent communities worldwide – a ranking where my city, Issy-les-Moulineaux, is listed as well. In Mitaka, I was able to see for myself that Japan has a major lead in the area of Broadband, in particular due to Fibre-to-the-Home.

These are the ideas and experiences we are able to share within the Global Cities Dialogue.

Technological convergence is a great opportunity to provide citizens with the technical means to access the knowledge society.

However, the convergence of ideas is even more important. And I know that the debates of the Global Forum will give us an excellent example of such kind of convergence.

Thank you very much for your attention.

André SANTINI  
Former Minister  
President of the Global Cities Dialogue  
Member of the French Parliament