The Spirit of the Challenge

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Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

In the next minutes I wish to tell you about the rise and development of the generous vision and spirit of the Stockholm Challenge Award.

It all started in 1995 when Sweden joined the European Union and in a brilliant stroke of 'enlightened self-interest," the City of Stockholm decided that they wanted to be at the centre of Europe in spite of their more peripheral geographical position.

The way to do it was by Challenging all large European cities to demonstrate whether they were "doing better than Stockholm" in each one of the 10 areas identified as strategic for information society development in Europe by the then famous policy report, The Bangemann Report. This report had been issued in 1994 by a high-level Commission chaired by European Commisioner Martin Bangemann.

So the Stockholm Bangemann Challenge was born and became a major success with the participation of over 120 projects submitted by approximately 25 large European cities. Fourteen winners were honoured at the time and the experience certainly fulfilled all expectations, not only positioning Stockholm at the centre of Europe, but also laying the foundations for an even more ambitious next event: the Global Bangemann Challenge.

Launched in 1997 during the final ceremony of the first European Challenge, the Global Bangemann Challenge took the contest to the entire world, attracting over 700 projects from all continents, a massive quantitative increase whose evaluation became a small challenge in itself. The Global Bangemann Challenge's final ceremony took place in June 1999, honouring 18 winners and paving the way for the launch of this year's Stockholm Challenge Award, with 7 categories, over 600 projects, and whose final ceremony we celebrate tonight again in the splendid Blue Hall of the city of Stockholm.

Looking back therefore it is clear that "enlightened self-interest" has been an important driving force in the rise and development of the Challenges. Most importantly, this "enlightened self-

interest" carries a profound vision and spirit of generous contribution to the dream of "an information society for the benefit of all."

In effect, from the first event it became clear that in the spirit of the Challenge "everybody is a winner" and not only the Award winning projects, or even the City of Stockholm through their success in creating the prime world event for pioneering information society projects.

Truly, the vision and spirit of the Challenge went much deeper than the result of a high-profile international competition. At the dawn of the era of the information society, it understood that humanity is engaged in a massive long-term learning process, much of it trial and error, that is simultaneously carving the shape of the global information society.

It understood that, in this process, free market and competition are certainly central dynamic forces, but that there are major issues concerning globalization and, particularly, the complex goal of "social inclusion", of the elimination of the divide between "information-rich" and "information-poor", of the elimination of the divide between the "have" and "the have-not," that require dialogue and collaborative approaches by all those working for an "information society for all."

This is where the spirit and contribution of the Challenge has been shining high as a beacon signalling the possibilities of working together for a better future.

In particular the Challenge offers the opportunity and a practical framework to nurture a globally-shared learning environment of information-society projects. Already the contest has created a powerful platform for pioneering projects, experiences and individuals to become visible, to network, and to learn from each other.

The Challenge has an in-built assessment of best-practice mechanism in the presence of its international jury, and encourages sharing and emulation of this best-practice knowledge and experiences as a way to enrich and inform the practice of those pioneering individuals and organisations who are driving the dawn of the information society.

During the Global Bangemann Challenge, for instance, a global virtual seminar attracted hundreds of people to discuss the lessons and difficulties faced by a number of selected projects competing in

the Challenge. Scores of people visited the Challenge website and many pointed to the greatly inspirational role of the initiative.

Indeed, this inspirational role has already seen the concept of winning projects travelling from their home towns to other parts of the world, such as the case of the New York's HarlemLive Global Bangemann Challenge winning project which is now being implemented in South Africa.

Last but not least, together with its inspirational role, the Challenge has given all those who are battling day to day to build the information society in their cities and countries, a reason to dream of the possibility of global recognition for the fruits of their endeavours. It has created the possibility of a fleeting but beautiful and highly energising event that should help in the less glamorous, often frustrating days, of most of the year.

For all these reasons, the Challenge is fundamentally about 'building the future together' rather than a simple competition of one project against another. For all these reasons, in the vision of the Challenge every participant is a winner, benefitting from a prestigious world's stage and the enhanced opportunities for interactions and potential partnerships with projects in other cities and countries from all continents of the globe.

But the story of the Vision and Spirit of the Challenge does not end here. In 1998, this vision became a central plank of the initiative of the Global Cities Dialogue promoted by the Joint Political Platform Global Bangemann Challenge and Telecities Network and chaired by the then European Commissioner Martin Bangemann, with the support of the European Commission's Information Society Activity Centre (ISAC).

Today this vision and spirit of sharing and collaborating to build a better information society has been imprinted in the Declaration of Helsinki "Mayors of the World for A Global Cities Dialogue on the Information Society;" a document containing a political commitment to work together for a better information society and already signed by many Mayors or senior political representatives of cities across the world. Among the beliefs and commitments in the Declaration, the following have been part of the spirit of the Challenge for long:

A belief in:

?? that the development of the Information Society should be for the benefit of all citizens, communities and peoples of the world, regardless of race, social position, creed, gender or age.

?? A belief in that there is a need for conscious steps to improve social cohesion and help avoid the division between information-rich and information-poor citizens and communities both inside societies and between societies.

?? A belief in that the early phases of development of the Information Society imply a learning process in which the sharing of experiences, results and lessons among cities will be most beneficial.

A commitment:

?? to ensure the application of Information Society Technologies in cities with a view to improving the quality of life and work of individuals, the quality and cost-effectiveness of services, and the effective progress towards sustainable development.

?? A commitment to tackle the low technological literacy, poor public access and shortage of skilled people that in many cities and countries represent a major obstacle to an equal-opportunity Information Society.

?? A commitment to encourage the sharing of experiences, results and lessons among the cities in order to facilitate a local and global process of information society learning and development.

Not surprisingly, the Stockholm Challenge Award constitutes a key initiative for the practical realization of the Global Cities Dialogue.

Finally the Stockholm Challenge Award has also inspired other cities to follow the example and make a generous contribution to the cause of "an information society for all."

The City of Rome, for instance, has launched the Global Junior Challenge, an international award for the most innovative, user-friendly and widely-beneficial projects in the field of training and education for children and the young. Rome and Stockholm have collaborated in this new Award,

which is still open for Project submission until the end of September 2000, with the Ceremony to take place in Rome on 4th December 2000.

This is Ladies and Gentlemen how far the Spirit of the Challenge has already reached. Tonight, in the Award Ceremony you will see it reflected in the beautiful concepts and hard work of this year's winners of the Stockholm Challenge Award. I invite you all to take this spirit to all corners of the world wherever and whenever you have the opportunity to advance the noble cause of "an information society for the benefit of all."

Thank you very much for your attention.