Bridging the Digital Divide

‘...the Digital Divide is about all other divides, it’s not just a digital divide, it’s a divide in education, it’s a divide in health, it’s a divide in infrastructure, it’s a divide in power. Mohamed Siddra Mansaray

The digital divide expresses the social, economic and geographical inequalities witnessed across the world in the area of access and use of digital technologies and software applications. These inequalities are even more acute we consider the ever greater importance played by Internet and multimedia as more and more individuals in both rich and poor countries integrate this medium in their social and professional lives.

To bridge the divide, infrastructures capable of offering basic telecommunications services have to be created. We have thus witnessed, worldwide, over the past decade, the built-up of fixed and wireless networks offering a large selection of communication services. But that is not enough to respond to the challenges of the Divide. We also have to ensure that the costs of acquiring these technologies and the tools that accompany them be affordable to the largest number of users.

Furthermore, persistent efforts are required to offer Internet and multimedia users digital content that is of quality and respectful of different expressions of cultural diversity and interests. This is the context in which FIAM is holding its third Summit which will bring together in Montreux (Switzerland) major world Internet and multimedia actors. The purpose of this encounter is:

- To draw from the varying experiences of Internet and multimedia associations to show how regional and national multimedia industries are tackling the issue of the digital divide and what efforts they are making to address inequalities of access to and use of digital technologies and content.

- To involve Internet and multimedia associations and other FIAM members toward building strong consensus around industry priorities and projects designed to bridge the digital divide and to identify the private and public sector actors with whom FIAM and its members can act jointly.

- And to allow FIAM associations and their members, to intervene and represent the interests and intentions of the multimedia industry in the decision-making process leading to the World Summit on the Information Society--WSIS (Geneva, December 2003) where important decisions will be taken affecting national and regional information technology and multimedia policies, structures and investment programs.

We will address these objectives by looking at several areas of industry activity:

- Affordable multimedia tools and applications produced nowadays that allow greater use and enjoyment of interactive digital content;
- National and international technology and know-how transfer mechanisms that help the development of local multimedia industries; global, national and local initiatives allowing for the development of original, localized and diverse interactive digital content;
- And finally, legal and regulatory frameworks that facilitate the multimedia industry’s production and distribution of digital content nationally and internationally.