

UN'S INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BODY TO FOCUS ON FOUR MAJOR CONCERNS New York, May 18 2008 6:00PM A leading United Nations body working to spread the benefits of information technology should concentrate on the four areas that most concern people around the world, the chair of that body said today.

Craig Barrett, Chair of the UN Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Development, told the third annual meeting of the Global Alliance in Kuala Lumpur that people were most interested about: getting software and hardware, connectivity, local content and ICT education.

The Global Alliance "should concentrate on programmes that focus on access," such as public-private partnerships, community centres and ICT for schools, said Mr. Barrett, who is also the Chairman of Intel.

It should concentrate "on the fundamentals of getting connectivity; on local content, which can create huge local economic possibilities; and on educating people on using the technology -- and there are marvellous new education programmes out there that are reaching millions of teachers."

The top UN official for economic and social affairs also called for a more focused scope. "The Global Alliance is at a turning point," said Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang, whose department hosts the Alliance.

"It has the brand -- it is a big name now. It has the recognition, the platform and the networks," he told some 150 participants of the Alliance's Strategic Council. "It has launched initiatives and partnerships that are already yielding initial results. It is now important to better focus the work of the Alliance on fewer activities of strong impact."

Maximus Ongkili, Malaysia's Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation and co-chair of the meeting, said his country and the Global Alliance had a similar approach on the issue: both were involving all interested parties, mobilizing global partnerships, stressing the importance of human capital and emphasizing knowledge-sharing.

"ICT is gaining importance in addressing climate change and the food crisis," said International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré, a member of the 17-person Alliance Steering Committee. "On these issues, ICT is part of the solution, not part of the problem," he said.

The Alliance, which was launched in Kuala Lumpur in June 2006, had already achieved results, Mr. Barrett said, such as "improvements in education, health care and the ability of governments to communicate with their citizens." A health-care project supported by the Alliance had won an award for the best application of ICT in India, he noted.

Global Alliance Executive Coordinator Sarbuland Khan said that in the past year the body had organized or co-organized some 15 events involving over 6,000 participants, including the first-ever meeting bringing together the private sector and the UN on the issue of climate change.

Created by the UN Secretary-General in 2006, the Global Alliance seeks to mobilize the human, financial and technical resources required to bridge major gaps in ICT infrastructure, services and applications across the world. Its main areas of focus are education, health, economic development and online government services. The Alliance is self-funded, and has been able to raise close to \$1 million per year from governments, corporations, foundations and other sources.