

## **DECLARATION: LET US KEEP INTERNET USE A PRIORITY IN VENEZUELA**

The Venezuelan state has labeled internet use a superfluous and luxurious item by including it in Decree No. 6649, published in the Official Gazette dated March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009. Said decree is titled *Presidential Instructions for the Elimination of Luxury or Superfluous Expenses in the Public Sector*.

By submitting internet use to the consideration of the Executive Vice-president, the decree violates the public policies of the Venezuelan state, since internet was declared a priority in Decree No. 825 and the State has made efforts to use internet for the benefit of efficiency in public administration, health and education. Decree No. 6649 could affect the development of projects linked to information technologies.

It concerns us that internet use be labeled a superfluous activity in academic activity and university life. Internet's collaborative, free-access, horizontal and universal nature has made it a natural stronghold of science. Venezuela is part of different international research projects supported by internet use. Without internet, it would have been impossible to measure our capacities and to generate contributions in several knowledge areas such as medicine, biology and geography. The National Center for Technological Innovation and the Academic Network of National Research Centers and Universities channel our participation as a country in the Latin American Cooperation Network of Advanced Networks (Spanish acronym RedCLARA). The purpose of the latter is to facilitate high-level research in Latin America by connecting it to its scientific peer communities in Europe, Asia, the Pacific and North America, thus allowing access to data bases and laboratory and scientific instruments throughout the world. We must guarantee that the sustainability of university projects based on information technologies is not affected by budget cuts.

We share the government's concern with the need to decrease public spending. However, we deem it inconvenient to decrease the budget assigned to internet use and to the technological platforms that support it. These investments contribute to the optimal use of resources in public administration, health and education. We propose considering cost rationalizing mechanisms different from those that bar the normal development of internet projects in public institutions.

Internet is a necessary tool for social development and for free access to knowledge, thus we urge:

- To exclude internet use from Decree No. 6649 titled *Presidential Instructions for the Elimination of Luxury or Superfluous Expenses in the Public Sector*, since the elimination of internet in the public sector is not an appropriate mechanism to optimize investment in development and appropriation of information technologies.
- To maintain the status of internet use a priority, as established by Executive decree No. 825.
- To decree good practice internet policies in order to save bandwidth in public institutions and to develop strictly institutional measures for internet use, so as to rationalize use of this service.
- To develop technologies associated to internet use that may help optimize public resources and foster institutional education on internet's effective application.

One of the strategic objectives of the 2007 – 2013 National Plan for Telecommunications, Informatics and Postal Services, is to optimize administrative processes and to boost electronic government through the use of information technologies, of which internet use is a fundamental axis. In practice, much progress has been made in processes such as passport applications, income tax payment, review of public data for social comptrollership and other activities that make internet use an increasingly natural trait of public administration.

The State passed the Law of Data Messages and Electronic Signatures and the Special Law of Electronic Crimes, both of which constitute an avant-garde legal framework for the novel transaction mechanisms facilitated by electronic communication. With the application of these laws and similar strategies, savings of more than 80% in office materials have been estimated, since electronic communications take the place of traditional registries of information in public management. The recent investment of 400 million US dollars in the Simón Bolívar Satellite is a clear example of the state's trust in information technologies for developing social projects. Sustainability and optimization of these ideas depend to a great extent on internet use continuing to be a priority.

We propose the application of policies that encourage an institutional culture that fosters activities such as videoconferences to carry out meetings and discussions,



and the use of technologies such as Voice over IP. These two technologies are examples of practices that would allow considerable savings in telephone bills and per diem expenses. We also propose the decreeing of good practices for internet use that entail savings in bandwidth in public institutions and the establishing of strictly institutional measures for internet use that help rationalize the use of this service.

The World Summits on the Information Society (Geneva, 2003; Tunes, 2005) have aimed at designing strategic plans to boost the use of information technologies. The Río Accords and the eLAC action plan show the importance of the issue for Latin America and the Caribbean. The IT component of the Andean Project for Competitiveness also fosters policies on the matter. Venezuela must remain in the front lines of these possibilities, strengthening public policies on the matter. We do so undersign this on the twenty third day of April, 2009.  
(support list available in the web)