

*Speech on the occasion of the 6th International Conference on
Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 2008)*

Wednesday May 28th in Marrakech

Mr Debbagh, Vice-Minister of Trade, Industry and New Technologies

First of all I would like to welcome all participants coming from all over the world for attending the 6th International Language Resources and Evaluation Conference (LREC 2008) organised by the European Language Resources Association (ELRA) in Marrakech from May 26th to June 1st 2008, held for the first time outside Europe.

I would also like to convey the apologies of Mr. Ahmed CHAMI, Minister of Trade, Industry and New Technologies who would have wished to be with us during this important event, had he not been called to another mission.

This Marrakech edition provides a unique occasion for Moroccan participants in particular, and for all participants from Africa and the Middle East, to join the discussion on the issues relating to the promotion of multilingualism through the production of linguistic resources in numerous languages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to take the opportunity of this important conference to present the strategy of the Government in the development of Communication and Information Technologies.

Conscious of the strategic nature of information and telecommunication technologies, Morocco has taken numerous initiatives recently: legislative and regulatory frameworks have been reviewed, liberalisation has been initiated and considerable effort has been put on infrastructure. At the same time, several measures have been adopted in favour of small and medium sized companies.

The telecommunication field is of utmost importance in our economic and social development and it has undoubtedly benefited from the liberalisation policies conducted in recent years. Mobile telephony, in particular, has witnessed an unprecedented growth rate which has reached 66.85% at the end of Q1 2008. This means, in other words, over twenty million subscribers.

This success in the telecommunication sector must inspire our efforts for a more democratic access to the Internet in our country. Concerted actions, involving both equipment and broadband access and content, will enable us to make progress with this incredible information and knowledge tool. We will thus create one of the levers which will contribute to improve Moroccan companies' productivity and competitive position.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ministry of Industry, Trade and New Technologies, has created a short-term priority action plan aiming essentially at reinforcing the foundations and the competitive position of Morocco in the fields of information and communication technologies.

This plan, which incorporates seven priority targeted actions for the period 2008-2009, will contribute to the improvement of the Moroccan position on the world scale and reduce the digital gap which separates the country from its major competitors.

The seven priorities in this plan are social transformation, adoption of communication and information technologies by companies, a user-oriented public service, modernisation of the administration, competitiveness of the sector, reinforcement of research and development (R&D), innovation in the field of information technology and improvement of the telecomm infrastructure.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The action plan for 2008-2009 will be achieved within the framework of a public/private partnership, which is an essential component in the success of this programme, the objective being to reinforce relationships with private groups, both Moroccan, through the Association of professionals of the information technologies sector, as well as international players.

The Government will implement the piloting structures and the coordination of this programme, which will be launched this July. In order to achieve this, a national council for the information society will be created, chaired by the Minister for Industry, Trade and New Technologies.

This plan, which objectives are both realistic and achievable insofar as they do not require a major financial effort is only the beginning. The Government is currently working on the development of a strategic plan for the period 2009-2013 which aims to literally transform Morocco into an information society.

This strategy is such as to provide serious momentum as regards the development of the information society both from an industrial point of view and from the point of view of the users.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Offshore activity, particularly in relation to call-centres, provides employment today for more than 20 000 people. And this sector, which did not exist only 8 years ago, generates today 2 billion-dirham annual revenues. It has consolidated its position by rightly adopting a strategy of high quality, added value and the maximal optimisation of human resources, which constitute the major trump card of Morocco in all fields from telephone to the Internet.

In order to reinforce its position as an offshore destination which can attract more investors in the most innovating sectors, Morocco must also promote linguistic engineering which nowadays enables extraction of textual information, translation or automatic abstracting, production of multi-lingual information, localisation of software and also voice recognition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that this conference will be a fruitful event in terms of debates and exchanges and that it will lead to results in your field.

As a conclusion, I would like to thank the European Language Resources Association for having chosen Morocco to host this important event. I thank all participants present here and wish you the best of success for your work.