Secretary-General, Excellencies, Mr. Executive Secretary, Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am here for a single purpose: to extend the warmest of congratulations to this innovative and extraordinary African enterprize: I thank you sincerely for your courtesy in inviting me to participate in this important occasion, and express my pride in the accomplishments of those dedicated individuals who have led this continent into the computer age.

Since the dawn of history it has been well accepted in all societies that knowledge is power. Denied access to knowledge, individuals and nations alike are incapable of exercising their full potential. That denial can take many forms. In the late twentieth century, denial can come as easily from too much information as it can from too little. The overwhelming quantity of information now being produced is of little use if it is not effectively managed - to permit storage, selection, retrieval.
It was the awareness of this truth - of the need for the organization of information - that prompted the efforts of those who dreamed of this project and who have brought it successfully to fruition. To them we all offer today hearty congratulations. Because of their accomplishment, Africa has gained in knowledge and in power. I offer tribute to each of them, but particularly to Professor Adebayo Adedeji, the Executive Secretary of ECA for his foresight and determination, to Mr. O. B. Essien, the Chief of the Technical Assistance Coordination and Operations Office and Dr. J. Quirino-Lanhounmey, the PADIS Project Manager, for their skills, their persistence, and their infectious optimism. Without the leadership of these persons, and the quality staffs associated with them, this important day would not have arrived.

PADIS, in short, is an absolutely essential tool for those involved in the development process. In that process, information is as valuable a resource as human beings or minerals beneath the soil. A rational development strategy cannot be formulated without relevant information. Relevancy, in turn, is impossible without organization. Only then can reliable projections, based on accurate knowledge, form the basis for taking decisions, designing policies, and implementing programmes.

The challenge is immense. Documents recording vital scientific and technical information are now being produced at the rate of several millions per year. Without a structure to control and
direct that flow the recipients would soon be overwhelmed. At IDRC we are firmly committed to the view that the users of that information are the ones best able to design the structure and to decide on relevance. In short, IDRC is a staunch advocate of self-reliance.

And it is a major step toward self-reliance that we are witnessing today. The mechanisms now in place, and in course of installation, will permit the countries of Africa to reach out, obtain, and employ the information that they themselves have chosen. This infrastructure allows Africans to make choices and to apply needed information to the solution of African problems.

Not all information of value is from foreign sources. A good deal of valuable knowledge comes regularly from African institutions engaged in research and study. Indeed in development terms, often the most valuable information is that produced locally in response to local perceptions of requirements and priorities.

But because no single country or region anywhere in the world can claim to be totally self-sufficient in information, any effective system must be based on cooperation with others. Thus the task that faced the architects of PADIS was to design a system that includes a capacity for acquiring and indexing information of African origin, that includes mechanisms for cooperation with other developing countries, and that includes a capacity to select and store - "to capture" in computer terminology - desired information from sources in the industrialized countries.
International cooperative information systems provide the mechanism to permit many countries to share among themselves the work of data or information capture, but they also allow each country complete freedom to employ the information so gathered in any way it chooses to meet national needs. Thus what Dr. Adedeji and his colleagues have dreamed of and are now well advanced in setting in place is an accurate embodiment of the African community itself - independent, cooperating states.

One of the pioneer international cooperative information systems is called AGRIS. It operates under the direction of FAO, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, and is a good illustration of the advantages of cooperation. Each participating country - and today there are about 100 of them - sends to FAO records that describe the information generated in its own territory on the subjects of agricultural science and technology. This information may take the form of a book, a thesis, a laboratory report, a journal article, or other. Worldwide, the entries in this consolidated file are growing at the rate of 120,000 per year or some 500 each working day. Under the AGRIS system, each participating country has access to the whole file, in the form of magnetic tape and printed indexes, and uses it as a basis for its own agricultural libraries. In the space of a few short years, AGRIS has come to be recognized as the single most comprehensive system in the world for the indexation and delivery of agricultural knowledge.
And the advantages to each participant are obvious. Each country contributes its own information. Each receives in return the total information contributed by all others. Truly a handsome arrangement. Equally important, the system contains a tested and stable set of rules and procedures that give effective voice to all the participants. It is a system in which the developing countries are equals with all others.

The success of AGRIS has prompted the hope that an information system can be built to serve the needs of ministries of planning, of development, banks, and of that part of the scholarly community that seeks to find new ways to improve and promote development processes. IDRC, in cooperation with five other international organizations participated in the design of such a system. It has come to be known as DEVSIS - for Development Sciences Information System.

DEVSIS has not yet been established on a worldwide basis, but national and regional institutions in many parts of the world are already cooperating to build the foundations for it. ECA's sister organization in Latin America is well along with the design and testing of a regional version of DEVSIS which it calls INFOPLAN. Several industrialized countries, Canada among them, are collecting their development information, indexing it, and preparing for the day when it can be offered to a global information system.
I am greatly encouraged by the initiative that the states of Africa and ECA are taking in this respect. And I am particularly happy that this pan-African effort involves a DEVSIS component. IDRC is proud to have been associated with the design of this system, with the training of the first group of ECA staff, and with the financing of the initial program.

This cooperative involvement by IDRC is one of many in which the Centre has been engaged, helping the developing countries build the information systems and services that will help meet the needs of their scientists and technologists, but as well the needs of the vast range of individuals concerned with development programs - ranging from government ministers to village headmen.

The Centre marked last year its 10th anniversary as a unique institution designed to respond to the needs of the research communities in the developing world by funding scientific activities designed in those countries, undertaken by local scientists and carried out locally. The Centre was created by the Parliament of Canada in response to a recommendation by the late Lester B. Pearson, Nobel Peace Prize winner and former Prime Minister of Canada. That commission urged the industrialized countries to undertake programs that would enhance the scientific and technological competence of the developing countries. Canada was the first to respond - with IDRC.
Although funded entirely by the Canadian Government, IDRC is independent, governed by an international Board half of whose members are non-Canadians and the majority of those from developing countries. At present, two distinguished Africans, one from Algeria and the other from Nigeria, serve on this Board, forming IDRC policies and guiding its activities. From the outset, the Board has insisted that the major thrust of Centre activities be for the ultimate benefit of those who live in the rural areas of the developing countries. The subject areas in which Centre financing and scientific support are available range through the agriculture, food and nutrition sciences, the health sciences, the social sciences and the information sciences.

Support of IDRC, and its goals of enhancing developing country scientific competence through the funding of research projects in those countries, remains a high priority for Canada. Prime Minister Trudeau has stated that the Centre is a modest but symbolic element in his efforts to draw together into a cooperative, mutually-beneficial community the industrialized and developing countries. And increasingly, the IDRC experience is demonstrating that developing countries are rich in the human resources necessary to become increasingly self-reliant in a broad range of activities.

The development process is complex. There are no instant answers, and surprisingly few solutions and formulae that are broadly applicable without the intervention of local adaptation efforts. Thus
PADIS should not for some time be expected to provide its full potential of benefits. Years of further effort will be required before all the mechanisms are in place and the human resources have been developed to derive the optimum advantages. But the process is now underway, and that is a cause for excitement as well as congratulation. PADIS, with its DEVSIS component, will begin immediately to demonstrate that "self-reliance" and "cooperation" are symbiotically related, and that they lead to enhanced human dignity - the ultimate goal of every development program.

I offer warmest good wishes to all involved in this important project.