

Remarks on the Occasion of the

Visit to IDRC of

President Vicente Fox

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**Maureen O'Neil
President, International Development Research Centre**

Thank you.

President Fox and Mrs. Sahagún de Fox, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

IDRC is very proud to host President Fox and the first lady of Mexico, Mrs. Sahagún de Fox. Welcome to both of you!

The project we are celebrating — @ Campus Mexico — is the culmination of several years of co-operation and collaboration between international partners. Its genesis goes back to discussions that took place at the Third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec City in 2001. At those meetings, leaders recognized that connectivity — the use of digital technology — is changing the face of societies throughout the Americas. Internet use is growing exponentially throughout the hemisphere. New digital technology is also allowing people to achieve a variety of goals much more cheaply than before — since these new technologies do not require the bulky infrastructure, the miles of cables or wires, that was required by previous generations of telecommunications technologies.

But while digital technology has created a revolution of new potential, there are still vast numbers of people in the Americas left behind. This, of course, is what is commonly referred to as the digital divide. At the Quebec Summit, the leaders took direct aim at the digital divide. They declared that digital technology should be used to serve the public good — used for the social development of countries in the hemisphere.

Canada is firmly committed to this idea that new technologies can help overcome longstanding socio-economic challenges. After the Quebec Summit, our federal government announced the provision of twenty million dollars in funding, as an expression of that commitment. That funding — administered by IDRC — was used as seed money to launch the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas — also known as ICA. ICA promotes the use of information and communication technologies for

development by supporting regional initiatives that use ICTs to achieve socio-economic goals. The Institute is now involved in over 40 connectivity initiatives.

For example, E-link Americas provides Internet access to remote communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The goal is to promote development by providing Internet access — and, by extension, access to critical sources of information — to health clinics, schools, community telecentres, and municipal governments.

The Latin American Network of Educational Portals will deliver — much more affordably — a wider range of educational materials in Spanish to schools.

Finally, the centrepiece of today's presentation: @ Campus Mexico. As we will hear later, this project — launched by President Fox just last week — is a comprehensive, online educational network that will serve more than 80 Federal institutions in Mexico, and approximately 47,000 public servants. Civil servants will receive training and certification through @ Campus Mexico. This will ensure the professional nature of the civil service and strengthen public administration and good governance practices.

IDRC is proud to contribute to innovative programs such as @Campus Mexico. And we feel that the history of our involvement with information and communication technologies makes IDRC well suited to help expand the use of ICTs for social development throughout the Americas.

IDRC also plays a part in the larger story of co-operation and friendship between Canada and Mexico. We have been collaborating with Mexican researchers for more than thirty years. And today, IDRC as an institution benefits immensely from the contribution of Mexican international health expert Octavio Gómez-Dantes, who is a member of IDRC's Board of Governors.

We are delighted that President Fox's government has given ICTs a central role in its comprehensive efforts to improve governance. @ Campus Mexico provides a shining example — to be seen throughout the Americas — of what can be achieved through innovation and through co-operation between nations.

Thank you.