"I would now like to shift to another area of great importance for higher education in the developing world. Here I refer to the rapid advances in communications and information technology of the last ten to fifteen years that have opened up the prospect of dramatically expanding international linkages and the reach of educational programmes in both spatial and temporal terms....

"The ability to project programmes and activities over great distances can bring educational opportunities and resources into settings where they are poorly developed at present, because of financial constraints, or sheer isolation. Where individuals have access to computers in their homes or, as will be the case in rural areas in developing countries for some time to come, in community centres, technology can provide the first real opportunity for lifelong education on a broad scale. One lesson is clear. The mastery of the use of the essential elements of communication and information technologies will have to be part of the experience of every university student sooner rather than later. The use of the technology should have a place in the educational process itself, and its mastery should be on the list of competencies that every graduate should possess.

"But this is only the first step. Even in the United States, the founder and leader in the development and application of information and communication technologies, the realisation of their potential for education is still at a very early stage. A few weeks ago Lawrence Grossman, former president of NBC News and the Public Broadcasting Service, and Newton Minow, former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission and
PBS made this point in their op-ed piece entitled The U.S. Should Invest in a Digital Library that appeared in the International Herald Tribune. They introduce the recommendation in the article’s title by observing that:

'... the Internet and digital communication are being largely wasted in America as a resource for the kind of broad education the future demands,” that “... entertainment of marginal quality dominates commercial attempts on the Internet to reach a mass audience,” while at the same time “the treasures in U.S. libraries, schools and museums are locked away for want of money to make them available to the full American audience.'

"I have quoted this article at some length not to advocate Grossman’s and Minow’s solution — although I think it makes great sense for the United States and would also be a priceless gift to the rest of the world and the cause of world peace. I do so because it so clearly and authoritatively makes the case for concrete and imaginative steps that may lead to a fuller utilisation of the Internet for educational purposes. It is not a question of a single cosmic solution, but rather a wide range of initiatives. The Internet was created at an international research institute in Switzerland as a means to make data and finding readily available without cost to scientists around the world. Institutions of higher education have a responsibility to participate in the process of developing and shaping the use of the Internet for educational purposes in their societies and around the world.

"At a seminar entitled Architectural Education Today held in Switzerland two weeks ago, William Mitchell, Dean of the School of Planning and Architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an authority on the use of the Internet for a wide range of purposes, offered a succinct summary of some of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of the Internet for remote education. He stated that the debate that focuses on conventional versus remote education is wrongly formulated. The issues are their relative advantages and disadvantages -- including effectiveness and cost -- and their complementary use.

"Remote education is disadvantaged because it does not offer the value-added that comes
with proximity to the instructor and the cross fertilisation with other students in the classroom or studio. Because users need facilities and training to draw on it and shape it to their needs, it carries high overheads, particularly at the outset. On the positive side, remote education has the advantages of scale. It dramatically increases the reach to scattered rural communities, which still represent the vast majority of the developing world’s population, it adds the possibility of bringing imported expertise into remote and isolated contexts, it creates opportunities for cross-cultural experiences, and it makes possible the broad collaboration of specialists in scattered locations. Dean Mitchell contends that such efforts can reap the benefits of what he calls 'educationally mediated globalisation,' which respects and incorporates intellectual diversity and cultural pluralism.”

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2001 address to the Association of American Universities Centenary Celebration (Washington D.C., USA)

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