Introductory Remarks by Ambassador Juan Eduardo Eguiguren, Chair of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development

Excellencies, Ministers
Distinguished representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In my capacity as Chairman of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), it gives me great pleasure to welcome such distinguished participants to this intersessional panel, which I hope will make an important contribution to the work of the Commission and of the United Nations System as a whole.

First, I would like to thank ECLAC for hosting this meeting and for actively contributing to its organization. At the same time I want to thank the UNCTAD Secretariat – that serves the CSTD – for the huge amount of work done in order to have a productive session.

I would like to make a few comments on the work of the CSTD, taking into account that it is a functional commission of the ECOSOC which meets regularly in Geneva, and that since its inception in 1992 has had a mandate on science and technology. From 2007 it has been working as a reformed body that has been given a second mandate: to oversee the follow-up of the implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) outcomes.

As you all know, the WSIS held in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) acknowledged the urgent need to bridge the digital divide and to assist developing countries to benefit fully from the potential of information and communication technologies. Heads of States, Ministers and Heads of Delegations meeting in Tunis in November 2005 requested that ECOSOC – the main UN body that is in charge of the follow-up of Summits and UN Conferences – addresses this challenge through the CSTD.

The General Assembly adopted resolution 60/252 in March 2006, by which it reaffirmed the potential of information and communication technologies as powerful tools to foster socio-economic development and contribute to the realization of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and highlighted the importance of the contribution of the Summit to the building of a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information society so as to enhance digital opportunities for all people in order to help to bridge the digital divide.

In response to the WSIS Summit, the General Assembly requested ECOSOC to oversee the system-wide follow-up of the Geneva and Tunis outcomes of the Summit. To that end the Council had to review the mandate, agenda and composition of the CSTD, and consider strengthening the Commission. In 2006 in Geneva, ECOSOC adopted
Resolution 2006/46 that reformed the CSTD in order to address effectively its new mandate with regard to the follow-up of WSIS implementation.

In that respect, ECOSOC decided that the Commission shall review and assess progress made at the international and regional levels in the implementation of action lines, recommendations and commitments contained in the outcome documents of the Summit; to share best and effective practices and lessons learned and identify obstacles and constraints encountered, and to promote dialogue and foster partnerships, in coordination with other appropriate United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, to contribute to the attainment of the Summit objectives and the implementation of its outcomes.

All these changes were done within the spirit of UN reform and taking into account that it was agreed that the WSIS implementation should not require the creation of any new operational body or mechanism, but rather that – according to resolution 57/270 – ECOSOC should be in charge of the follow-up process of conferences and summits, and that the CSTD was the functional body best adapted to be given this task.

It was stated also that this new role given to the CSTD did not cancel its original mandate on science and technology for development, taking into account the provisions of paragraph 60 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome. In fact, the new mandate has given a renewed strength to the old one, as we will see in the discussion that Latin American Ministers and High Officials of Science and Technology will hold during this panel.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the 2005 World Summit held in New York, Heads of State and Government recognized that “science and technology, including information and communication technology, are vital for the achievement of the development goals and that international support can help developing countries to benefit from technological advancements and enhance their productive capacity” (para. 60).

The Panel that is starting today will dedicate itself to three main issues:

- Science, technology and engineering for innovation and capacity-building in education and research;
- Review of the implementation of the WSIS outcomes and follow-up, and development oriented policies for a socio-economically inclusive information society, and
- The role of science and technology and information and communications technology in addressing the food crisis.

As you can see, we have an ambitious agenda for these three days, in which we aim to receive and combine contributions and experiences in the three main themes offered by participants from a two perspectives: the regional level and the global level. The representatives from CSTD member states of different regions will provide a global focus. And as this meeting is taking place in Chile, Latin American representatives, specialists and organizations will offer a regional approach.
I hope that we will have an interesting and productive discussion on the relevant issues of this panel during these three days. The outcome of this panel – in the form of a report - should include conclusions and recommendations that will be presented to the next session of the CSTD in May 2009.

Thank you