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Launch of Smart News Network

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The launch of the Smart News Network International (SNNi) at this week's Global 2001-Southern Africa International Dialogue in Kampala will mark a significant step forward for the advocates of the smart partnership concept.

Member countries of the Smart Partnership International Dialogue, who will converge at Lake Victoria, will meet from Saturday and issue a mission statement at the end of the dialogue to state their support for the news network which will counter western media misrepresentation and biased reporting on developing nations.

The establishment of SNNi will be seen as one of the concrete achievements made since 1995 when the first Langkawi International Dialogue was held in Langkawi.

Briefing the Press on the dialogue's proceedings, Prime Minister's Representative to the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management (CPTM) Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman said 11 news agencies and newspapers have participated by contributing articles to the network via its website <http://www.snni.org/>

The 11 are Daily News of Botswana, Mozambique News Agency of Mozambique, Namibia Today of Namibia, Buanews of South Africa, New Vision of Uganda, The Herald of Zimbabwe, Seychelles Nation of Seychelles, and Bernama, New Straits Times, Star and Utusan Malaysia of Malaysia.

Under the arrangement, participating media organisations would contribute on a daily basis via the website - news, features, photographs and video images.

The server of the website is located here.

The idea of a news network was mooted in August last year in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, during the fourth Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID).

The leaders of participating nations felt that establishing a news network and forging close co-operation among developing countries would help their cause in fighting the Western media's biased reporting.

They had examined the issue comprehensively including asking themselves why their countries relied so much on Western media like the Cable News Network and Reuters for news about their own region.

In November last year, at the Global 2000-Langkawi International Dialogue, the idea came close to reality after a discussion between senior editors from Malaysia and African nations with the leaders.

Omar explained that the SNNi would function as "an alternative source of news on developing countries".

"It is not to replace the established western media ... it is just an additional news channel on developing countries," he added.

Several non-member countries of the SAID had also expressed interest in being a SNNi member.

On the dialogue in Kampala, Omar said the leaders would be discussing about "enhancing the climate for foreign direct investment through smart partnership".

The African nations, said Omar, would like to identify ways to attract FDIs to the continent.

"President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda is keen on overcoming the problems affecting FDIs inflow," he added.

About 450 participants from Uganda, Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia,

Tanzania, Malawi, South Africa, Ghana, Congo, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Rwanda, Sudan, Malaysia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Grenada will take part in the four-day dialogue.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will head the Malaysian delegation.