The world today is at a very difficult juncture: On the one hand, it is deeply afflicted by an economic and social crisis which may have severe repercussions on the economy, society and international relations in the future. Dangers and new threats to peace and security are on the rise. Some of these threats are long-standing; others are exacerbated by new challenges posed by climate change, fundamentalists of various creeds, organized crime, and international migration, among others.

On the other hand, science and technology are advancing in leaps and bounds, with innovations in all sectors that promise to generate goods and services to definitively tackle global hunger and social exclusion. Mankind now has a historic opportunity to overcome poverty.

In the midst of these possibilities, powerful instruments have been developed: the new information and communication technologies (ICT), opening the doors to a new economy, a new society, a new way to engage in politics, a new system of international relations and, most importantly, a new distribution of global power.

Use of the ICTs have brought about major changes to the economy by introducing “knowledge” as a driver for production. This new approach to economic relations deeply transformed development models, created new products and promoted new production systems changing international economic relations.

The ICTs are opening the doors for a more educated, better informed and more connected society, one that moves towards a broader middle class with new social values, aspirations and demands. The information and communication technologies are fueling these processes, heralding a knowledge-based society capable of finding innovative and promising solutions to achieve social inclusion, a long-standing aspiration of mankind. Only time will tell if this statement holds true, but I believe we are on the right path.

The ICTs were used recently in politics demonstrating their power to influence and even change the way in which politics are engaged, putting leaders in touch with the grassroots. The proliferation of social networks and new ways to stay informed and to communicate have triggered deep changes in the connection between politicians and the people. In fact, the new technologies are changing the values and the qualifications sought in politicians, demanding ever greater transparency in their actions and changes to how they govern.

In international relations, the ICTs are penetrating the new faces of globalization. Among other phenomena, they help generate novel approaches to trade, to investment decisions, and to corporate restructuring to create global enterprises. More importantly, they open doors for innovation, not only to create new products but also new business models and new production systems that reshape international trade and relations.

These challenges and opportunities raise several problems: first and foremost, training human resources so they will have the skills to embrace the new economic world and the knowledge-based society. This
can be accomplished through a deep overhaul of the entire education system, emphasizing research, science and technology. There is also a need for public and private institutions capable of efficiently serving the new economic and social forms.

The state will play a key role in these tasks. Furthermore, governments have the responsibility of modernizing their apparatus, making full use of the new technologies to change how they govern and, most importantly, how to be accountable to society.

The role of the state in the economy has been a matter of debate since the very inception of the capitalist economic system. The issue has been and remains a challenge for all existing political and economic systems in the world.

The state is the lynchpin for the development of our societies. At issue is not the size of government—a topic in the realm of national debate—but how to provide the modern state with instruments to enhance its efficiency, make it more accountable to society and able to assume responsibility for the changes taking place.

Here again, the ICTs are providing valuable and successful contributions to improve the efficiency and accountability of governments. One of the most pressing needs is to redefine the relations between the state and the market. While we need efficient, regulated markets, we also need governments capable of reacting to the new challenges posed by society and the economy. The new technologies are helping redefine these relations. Some of the experiences described in this book are especially illustrative of the many actions adopted by governments.

I believe this book provides a valuable contribution as it examines the impact of ICTs on many sectors, focusing in particular on the new role of society, the global economy, and the state. Technological innovation in the use of the ICTs has spawned dynamic and continual production. Today, there are innumerable experiences fruit of innovation and creativity at every level. Rather than being the sole purview of Research Centers, such innovations are to be found in many arenas, an encouraging sign as to the viability of state reform.

Knowledge about these experiences is in part the purpose of this book, and sharing them is its best contribution given the caliber of the contributors and the wide range of cases presented.

I congratulate those who supported this effort for the many interesting contributions contained in this book.

Enrique V. Iglesias
Ibero-American Secretary General, Madrid, Spain
& Former President of the Inter-American Development Bank, Washington D.C., USA