

Brief

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The Role of Civil Society in the World Summit on the Information Society Tunis 2005

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<p>C A S I N</p>	
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The Role of Civil Society in the World Summit on the Information Society Tunis 2005

CASIN's Programme on NGOs and Civil Society studied the role and reaction of civil society in last November's World Summit on the Information Society. The main objective of this brief is to observe the multi-stakeholder process, a new process appearing in WSIS, and to analyse the results of the Summit for civil society.

Obviously, this brief is structured in a simpler way than reality. It is divided in positive and negative aspects for civil society. It is important to note, however, that there are always two sides to a coin. All issues in Tunis were more complicated than a simple black-and-white dichotomy. The procedures and the contents had motivating and frustrating elements for civil society. The choice made here is to simplify these issues in order to present them in a clearer way.

Introduction

The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases. The first one took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003, hosted by the Swiss government and the second one in Tunis from the 16 to 18 November 2005, hosted by the Tunisian government. The UN agency that held the leading role in the organization of the Summit was the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), based in Geneva.

The first phase (in Geneva) had the objective to develop a clear statement of political will and took concrete steps to establish the foundation for an Information Society for all. One of the main aims was to develop a common vision of "the Information Society". A Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action were adopted on 12 December 2003. During the time between the two phases, the process was to monitor and evaluate the progress of feasible actions laid out in the Geneva Plan. It was also planned to launch a concrete set of deliverables that must be achieved by the time the Summit met again in Tunis. The objective of the second phase (in Tunis) was to evaluate the work that had been done during that time; measures were supposed to be taken to bridge the digital divide and hasten the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals with the help of ICTs (Information Communication and Technologies). The second phase was supposed to be "the summit of solutions".

WSIS gathered representation from governments, but also invited the participation of all relevant UN bodies and other international organisations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, civil society and media. In this sense, we can say that WSIS launched a new process: "the multi-stakeholder process".

Multi-Stakeholder Process

From the beginning, the idea of a multi-stakeholder approach was essential in the development of the Summit. For most actors, this Summit was going to be a new step in the idea of partnership and inclusion of non-governmental participants in global summits¹. In other words, the consultation and decision-making process was evolving. Obviously NGOs would be at the heart of this new approach, but also media, the private sector and all relevant international organisations.²

¹ For more information on how civil society was structured in the WSIS, the "Orientation Kit" explained it very well. Cf. <http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs>

² Please observe that this process is not identical to the International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s one. We speak in the first case of collaboration between actors, the decisions being taken only by governments. Civil Society is only

The 2003 Geneva Declaration of Principle³ states that: “(...) All stakeholders should work together to improve access to information and communication.” We can also observe the importance of civil society in the Geneva Plan of Action⁴ (2003) “The commitment and involvement of civil society is equally important in creating an equitable Information Society, and in implementing ICT-related initiatives for development.” Civil society was called on to play an essential role before, during and after the WSIS. But, as it is too often the case, the reality was not as satisfactory as expected, especially in the Tunis phase, despite the fact that civil society representatives formed the largest group with 6000 out of 18000 delegates.

In the Tunis Commitment⁵ (2005), the approach was the same: “We call upon governments, private sector, civil society and international organisations to join together to implement the commitments set forth in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. (...) We are convinced that our goals can be accomplished through the involvement, cooperation and partnership of governments and other stakeholders.” But according to civil society actors, the theory did not translate so perfectly into practice.

Like in every summit, the preparation phase was crucial. In the WSIS case, civil society played a major role during the different stages before the Summit. Without going into details, we can observe some good examples of civil society’s participation in this preparation. During the three Prepcoms (the phases of preparation), civil society was consulted and had 15 minutes every morning to make presentations, which was a remarkable novelty. Civil society was also authorised to distribute proper documentation (and not merely leaflets or flyers outside the conferences). Even during some “working sessions”, which were supposed to be only for governments, and some negotiation sessions, civil society was authorised to attend as an observer.

The lack of integration came during the summit itself and mainly in its results. In Tunis, as we will see later, civil society’s participation was rather difficult because of different aspects, the two main problems being the Tunisian government and the lack of political will from participating governments. It is though important to note that the Summit itself was more of a political event and that, in any case, civil society was not going to be as present and influential as in the preparation of the WSIS.

At the end of the conference, to really express its point of view, differing on several aspects from the official one, civil society wrote its own statement (Civil Society Statement, 18th December 2005⁶). Concerning the follow-up of the WSIS, civil society now has a role to play in lobbying and helping governments to put into practice their promising words and it seems that they want to stay active in this field.

At the closing ceremony in Tunis, most governments and international organisations, even the Tunisian president Ben Ali, spoke about the success of the “inclusive approach” of the Summit. Everybody realised that it was of crucial importance that the different actors started to see each other’s points of view more clearly. Now that this approach is more accepted in theory, the next step will be to give more space in practice to non-governmental actors and to really include them in decision-making processes. As underlined by Amit Jain from BBC news, the most effective exchange of ideas doesn’t necessarily take place in lofty academic sessions.

While it is important to monitor the follow-up to WSIS in order to pass a final verdict, we can consider that the multi-stakeholder approach has been established as the next generation one for global governance.

consulting; it is not equal to governments. The ILO case is a real tripartism, meaning that the final decisions are an agreement between the three equal actors.

³Cf. <http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs>

⁴Cf. <http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs>

⁵Cf. <http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs>

⁶The full text is in annex.

Remarks on the Private Sector

When observing the multi-stakeholder approach in WSIS, it is crucial to briefly have a look at the private sector and its role in the Summit. In order to better understand how decisions are taken, it is important to have in mind the huge pressure coming from economic lobbies, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) or WSIS partners such as Microsoft or Siemens. As an example, several new alternatives such as Wifi connections or free software were not recognised in official texts because of pressure of these big economic lobbies.

Under the mandate of the ITU the ICC set up the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI) as the voice of business at the WSIS. It has 125 corporate members, mainly information technology and telecommunication (Siemens, Nokia...). As Sebban Guy said: "CCBI is the voice of the business community".

In comparison to other parts of civil society, the private sector got a better deal at the summit. The economic lobby played a role in preventing moves to place the Internet management under the control of a multilateral unit. Everything was done to create contacts and there were several exhibitions to show goods and gadgets: business went on. "A lot of marketing was going on!" Murali Shanmugavelan said.

There is a new strong will from business to "go for development": They want to look for partnership, involvement, and ethical investment. As Gora Datta, president of the US software company Cal2Cal, mentioned: "It is good for business to be able to reach much of the world's populations in emerging markets."

According to the Global Information Infrastructure Commission, a confederation of chief executives and other officers from leading businesses: "Business has been involved in the work of the summit because it makes good business sense to be involved. Both the private sector and the society at large are in a 'win-win situation'".

But several problems emerge from the "win-win situation" and make civil society rather anxious on the role of private sector. First, multinationals are pressing for privatisation that will attract foreign direct investment but to the detriment of local business growth. And even if "business is the driving force behind the creation of an information society", according to Guy Sebban, civil society observes that business is increasingly part of international meetings and that its influence is still increasing. Is it on its way to influence global issues beyond just business?

General Remarks

The most important question of the Summit was how to bring the Internet and computer technology to the world's poor. It is what the United Nations calls "the digital divide": bringing everyone into the information age. But other issues threatened to overshadow this main aim. These issues were the governance on the Internet and the questions related to the choice of Tunis as place to host the Summit.

"Who should control the net?" was the essential question of WSIS for lots of actors. Most countries were unhappy with US oversight of core net function. Others said that it should be a more collaborative approach. The US-based ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) wanted to remain in charge of the Internet control. A compromise emerged at the end of the discussions: the US will continue to oversee the net's day-to-day running, and the newly created Forum will give others a say. Civil Society appreciated the decision to create a Forum, but expressed its concerns on the effective role that it would play in it.

The other controversial point was the choice of Tunisia as the host country of the WSIS. How could a state that significantly limits the freedom of information host a global summit about information? Such criticisms seemed justified to many: How can the decisions of the global community be credible in a context like the Tunisian one? It was also risky for the Summit because the debates ran the risk of focusing on Tunisia's politics rather than on information society issues. As some people said, the Summit was in Tunisia not on Tunisia and the risk to mix them was high.

Before and during the Summit, the Tunisian government practiced a campaign of harassment against activists and journalists. Inside and outside WSIS, human rights violations occurred. Among other incidents: Robert Menard, the chairman of "Reporter sans Frontières", was prevented from entering Tunisia and forced to stay in the airplane. Christophe Boltanski, reporter for the French newspaper "Liberation", was harassed. Outside the Summit, the Tunisian government blocked several websites and, before the Summit, on several occasions detained or jailed some of those who ran the sites. Even inside the WSIS, several websites were not accessible (like Swissinfo). Eight Tunisian opponents to the regime decided to go on a hunger strike, which lasted a month. Most of them were lawyers and firmly convinced to denounce the human rights violations of their government. They were asking for more freedom and especially denouncing the abuse of political prisoners. They stopped their strikes at the end of the Summit, largely supported by the international civil society.

The fact that the Tunisian government did not recognise the existence of its own civil society constituted another fundamental problem because the organisations could not register for the Summit, as Wolf Ludwig from Communica-ch explained. NGOs need to be recognised at the national level in order to claim a legal existence. Without legal recognition, they were not allowed to be accredited to the WSIS. This also constituted a violation of human rights: Ben Ali's government, through this process, largely violated the right to access the WSIS. In a response to the civil society complaints on this attitude, Kofi Annan recalled that the Tunisian government was bound to accredit journalists and representatives of civil society to participate in the Summit. But the results were not the ones expected.

Linked to this aspect is the problem of GONGOs (Governmental Non-Governmental Organisations or NGOs pretending to be NGOs, but in reality closer to governments than to civil society). The legitimacy of some Tunisian NGOs was questionable and several people suspected them to be GONGOs. In the Tunis phase, this issue was raised throughout the process. Among other people, Shirin Ebadi denounced this practice around the world on several occasions.

It is also interesting to observe that even during the preparation phase (especially during the PrepCom 3 of the first phase), Tunisian NGOs suffered from intimidations from their government. This led to a protest letter addressed to the Director of the Executive Secretariat of the WSIS to which he answered, but he could not change the situation.

Media and freedom of expression groups called for an investigation by the United Nations into human rights attacks that took place in Tunisia on the eve of and during the WSIS. Steve Buckley, President of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, said that: "Never again should a United Nations World Summit be held in a country that doesn't respect its international commitments to human rights and freedom of expression."

In response to the Tunisian government's attitude and the lack of cooperation from other actors, global civil society decided to organise an alternative summit. The aim was first to address a message of solidarity to the Tunisian civil society and second, to deal with the questions of the WSIS from a civil society perspective. But unfortunately the alternative summit did not take place because of political pressure from the Tunisian government.

Positive Aspects for Civil Society

The Civil Society Statement starts with these words: “The WSIS was an opportunity for a wide range of actors to work together to develop principles and prioritise actions that would lead to democratic, inclusive, participatory and development-oriented information societies at the local, national and international levels (...).” The Statement underlines that civil society has contributed positively to the WSIS process even though its involvement could have been greater. The contribution was made “both through constructive engagement and through challenge and critique”. So, what are the positive aspects resulting from the WSIS for civil society?

The first big victory for civil society is its participation and recognition at the Summit despite all the unacceptable aspects mentioned. As Renate Bloem, from the Civil Society Bureau, was saying: “We have moved to become a partner in negotiations” and that is a huge step. “The innovative rules and practices of participation established in this process will be fully documented to provide a reference point and a benchmark for participants in UN organisations and process in the future,” says the Civil Society Statement. The first positive aspect is definitely this new acceptance of the multi-stakeholder approach.

The second aspect is the consensus attained: almost every country agreed on the importance of the use of digital communication for their development needs. Civil Society joined them in the recognition of these tools. Unfortunately, there were few agreements on financial means and measures to implement them.

Another positive aspect is that over the last years, civil society had succeeded in linking all the different groups: from gender groups to development community groups, farmers to children, national to global. Civil society was really one large group and that is also a step ahead. To find common interests and to fight together was a novelty because of the difficulties of making different actors of civil society meet. From the 90's, international meetings were excellent occasions for civil society to gather and share experiences. It is interesting to observe that these connections often also evolve in other directions and allow civil society to re-invent itself regularly. In addition to the previous points, these connections are also essential to ensure the follow-up of the summits, regarding the governments' engagements, for instance. As Sally Burch from CRIS (Communication Rights in the Information Society) explained, these kinds of international summits also allow different groups to gather and to share knowledge and experiences. They are a great opportunity to create links between them and through this process to become stronger. These links are the basis to create a real general movement. In this sense, CRIS's campaign was a good example. It had been built for the WSIS, but from the beginning had a view to looking beyond the Summit.

According to Stephania Milan, journalist for Terraviva, the Summit was very important for all the social movements: they learned how to develop a better understanding of the questions related to the issue of information and allow the different groups to create contacts among them. The cooperation aspect is fundamental and gives them increasingly more credibility on the global level. Sean O'Siochru from CRIS joined her in saying that the Summit helped civil society to refine its communication rights arguments by learning from different CSOs around the world. It is obvious that the context the WSIS offered was a great occasion to share experiences. And in a larger perspective, the WSIS was a unique platform to interact not only within civil society, but also with different actors on these issues.

A fourth point is the participation in the Internet Governance Forum: civil society gained recognition as a stakeholder in a new web body, along with governments, the private sector and international organisations even if it failed to wrest Internet management from a US-based agency. The problematic aspects are that the Forum lacks details, has a duration of 5 years, subject to extension, and has no management role. In addition to these elements, the views of

the Forum are not going to be binding. Opinions are not shared by all of civil society. Sally Burch, from CRIS, said that it was a good opportunity for civil society to participate and to be listened to. But others, like Anita Gurumurthy, from IT for a Change, estimated that the problem was not going to be solved this way. The first meeting, planned for 2006 will give us a better understanding of the process. It will show possibilities and limits of this system. But on a larger perspective, the result is that there is now a consensus that issues cannot be solved alone but have to be addressed through alliances and compromises.

It is important to note that the whole preparation process surrounding the question of Internet governance was revolutionary for civil society. It was the issue in which it was the most active in discussions and the most influential in debates because it was very well integrated. In this case, we can really speak of three equal actors discussing an issue. The results were a very good example of this real multi-stakeholder approach. In comparison, for example, the role of civil society in the issue of finances was frustrating: in this case, only experts from UNDP were in charge of the dossier and their way of working was rather untransparent and exclusive. Accordingly, the results were not satisfactory for civil society.

Along with this aspect, the Tunis Agenda addressed the issues of political oversight of critical Internet resources in its paragraphs 69 to 71 and, according to the Civil Society Statement, this is, in itself, an achievement.

In addition to this Forum other structures were proposed⁷. One proposal was to create a coordinating body within UN ECOSOC that would provide an integrating function for securing momentum and which would later evolve into a more open and inclusive entity. This entity would be the "ECOSOC Commission on Science and Technology for Development". If it works as supposed, this could be a useful element to coordinate the information society. The next step on this issue will be in June 2006.

The technological aspect was also of interest for civil society. Even if civil society underlined on several occasions that the priority nowadays was rather to invest in infrastructure (roads, electricity...) and Internet backbones to make the information society work, it found the ITC4D forum fascinating if the net's powers can be harnessed for development purposes. When Kofi Annan unveiled the now famous \$100 laptop, created by Prof. Negroponte of the MIT, civil society expressed its enthusiasm, but recalled that these tools were only interesting if they were used for development purpose. Civil society also raised another problem: all these initiatives were private ones; the need for a public implication was essential in the development of these solutions.

WSIS was also a very good platform to share examples of ICTs applied at the grassroots level to demonstrate the real power of the information society. Murali Shanmugavelan from Panos gave an example: In India, in some states, computerisation has greatly simplified the issuing of birth and death certificates, which would otherwise cost individuals two days plus bribes for local civil servants. WSIS constituted a real opportunity to share these kinds of knowledge and allow them to be spread all over the world. Around 2400 projects like the Indian one are already entered into an ITU database waiting to be used in different countries. Along with these projects, a new tool was launched: the Global Knowledge Partnership. It is a programme to stimulate and gather a vast series of concrete projects to allow poor countries to get information technologies.

Apart from these previous positive aspects, civil society took also the opportunity to raise awareness on human rights problems. Several NGOs (Reporters Sans Frontières, OpenNetInitiative...) denounced Internet censorship in 15 countries. A list was published, mentioning China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia among others. Human Rights Watch published a report on the control of the Internet in North Africa and in the Middle East. It claims that these governments use this system to control different aspects of society: For instance, in Egypt, they arrested homosexuals, having identified them through the net; in Syria, the same happened to

⁷ Cf. "The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society", art 104 et 105

some opponents criticising the regime. The WSIS was a platform to denounce these abuses around the world.

Apart from these denunciations, civil society demanded the establishment of an independent commission to review national and international ICT regulations and practices compliant with human rights standards.

Negative Aspects for Civil Society

Civil society expressed its concern through its Statement on several specific and crucial aspects. To start with it underlined that “(...) during the WSIS it emerged that some governments, especially from developed countries, lack faith in, and appear to be unwilling to invest authority and resources in the present multilateral system, along with concerted efforts to further improve it”. They felt concerned about the fact that “shrinking global public policy spaces raises serious questions concerning the kind of global governance towards which we are heading (...)”. This severe critique has to be listened to carefully. Actually, several governments treated the WSIS like a non-event. Of the 27 heads of state to address the plenary thus far only Swiss President Samuel Schmid represented a developed country. In this sense, civil society reaffirms the danger of unilateralism and the importance of structures like the United Nations to serve as a place of dialogue.

A second important issue was the “de-credibilization” of the WSIS. For most actors of civil society, the Tunisian government’s acts overshadowed the development agenda. With its obvious human rights violations the Tunisian government had shown its lack of consideration for international law standards and by doing so “undermined” the credibility of the Summit and the legitimacy of its results.

Thirdly, as Chantal Peyer, from Bread for All, stated, the Summit was supposed to be “the one of solutions”, but the conclusion was rather different: a total lack of political will from rich countries. The Tunis phase did not provide concrete achievements to meaningfully address development priorities. The results were no investment, no public policy, and no efforts from the North to help the South. Renate Bloem, President of the Conference of NGOs, asked the well-founded question: “Is the international community honestly committed to allocating the financial resources necessary to bridge the digital divide?”

The lack of concrete results was particularly strong in the domain of financing measures to face the digital divide. The widely praised private-public partnership in this area mostly means a dominance of the private sector. As mentioned by some NGO activists, it is observable that now the core conflict between the pro-free market and the one asking for public accountability and responsibility suffers from a de-politicisation.

The position of the EU and the USA is rather clear: They want to limit their contribution and finance to the current, insufficient aid mechanism. As Chantal Peyer explained: “For the rich countries, the only people in charge to fill in the digital divide are the governments of the developing countries. The notions of cooperation and coordination have disappeared. This is a way to implement their liberal agenda.” The developing countries’ governments are asking for supervision from the United Nations on this question, but the developed countries do not want to hear anything going in this direction. The key word is ‘no concrete measures on this issue’.

As the Civil Society Statement says: “The WSIS failed to recognize that ICT for Development presents a challenge beyond that of traditional development financing. Nor did the Tunis Summit fully comprehend that new means and sources of financing and the exploration of new models and mechanisms are required.” But it is relevant to underline here that civil society has succeeded to introduce significant sections in the Tunis Commitment (paragraph 35) and in the

Tunis Agenda (paragraph 21) on the importance of public policy in mobilizing resources for financing. This will create a balance to the very market-based orientation of the texts.

The only way to proceed on these questions for now is on a voluntary basis. The best example is the Digital Solidarity Fund. The DSF proposal has become one voluntary initiative among others. As the Civil Society Statement expresses: “We are concerned that there are no clear commitments from governments and the private sector to provide the needed material support to ensure the success of this fund.”

The cancellation of the alternative summit, The Citizens’ Summit on the Information Society (CSIS), which was to be an answer to the decision of non-recognition by the Tunisian government of several civil society members was also a negative point. It shows that a formal commitment is one thing and implementation is something else. The alternative summit was unable to find a venue for its events. The spaces booked for the CSIS were all cancelled for reasons linked to political pressure from the Tunisian government. The only alternative action, which was not cancelled, was a press conference in the office of the Tunisian League of Human Rights.

Finally, the lack of progress in translating and implementing the more than 50 years old international human rights standards for the information society affected civil society. Also, as Titi Akinsanmi, speaking for the Youth Caucus, said, the fact that the Summit almost forgot privacy as one of the most important rights for the Internet age showed the absence of several crucial aspects. For instance, this right to privacy is only mentioned in the Geneva Declaration as part of “a global culture of cyber-security” and has disappeared in the Tunis Commitment to make room for extensive underlining of security needs. The human rights aspect is still problematic at all levels.

Governments have ignored other crucial questions during the Summit. Among others, the concentration of media or the cultural diversity issue were unfortunately not discussed.

Perspectives: What’s Next?

On the last day of the WSIS, the CRIS Campaign organised a gathering with key participants of civil society to discuss ways of keeping up the pressure and making sure that the visions developed around the WSIS process will be implemented. A large number of projects were proposed. Among several, these three main issues will keep civil society busy:

- The Forum on Internet governance and how to influence it.
- The finance debate, which suffers from a lack of interest from the part of civil society and non-transparency from the part of the Task Force on Financial Mechanism. Chantal Peyer, from the coalition on financing, expressed the need to re-frame the financial debate as a public policy debate. She proposed that civil society participate in the Digital Solidarity Fund and also focus on original civil society initiatives such as community-owned networks.
- The difficulties of the inter-governmental debate on implementation and follow-up mechanisms. As Bertrand de la Chapelle, convenor of the follow-up working group, explained: “Governments have accepted the multi-stakeholder principle in the documents but not in their hearts and practices. The battle has only just begun. The challenge is on us to keep up the pressure.”

Civil Society also wants to see measures against the violation of human rights in Tunisia; concrete acts to oppose these violations have to be launched. This strong will comes mainly from Amnesty, Ifex (a coalition of 14 NGOs) and Communica-ch (a Swiss coalition of NGOs) asking for inquiries into these violations. They issued an appeal to Kofi Annan for a formal investigation into the

treatment of journalists by the Tunisian government and also into the different sorts of harassment and the denial of entry to Tunis of others.

In addition to these points, most governments decided to go beyond exclusive UN responsibility, meaning that civil society has a major role to play and could become prime forces of implementation. According to Bertrand de la Chapelle, this is a huge improvement. But not all share his optimism. Claudia Padovani expressed her doubt regarding the multi-stakeholder process and suggests moving to true participatory governance. Activists from India underlined the attitude of governments from the North unwilling to commit to any meaningful follow-up process.

It is important to observe that most of the links created around the WSIS remain active and will be very useful for other coming summits (WTO, Social Fora...) in order to create a strong civil society impact.

To conclude, several civil society networks used the opportunity to present their own plans for future work. For instance Communica-ch will focus on developing and advocating for the public domain. CRIS, which was created for the WSIS, will continue to exist after the Summit and it will continue to influence global governance mechanisms on information and communication issues, for example at the WTO or WIPO.

Conclusion - The caravan will move on...

The WSIS concluded with claims of success by the United Nations, governments and the private sector, but Civil Society refused to embrace its outcome. "Success or failure is too strong to characterise the Summit", said Anriette Esterhuysen, executive director of Association for Progressive Communication. "It has been valuable. The impact is yet to be seen."

Maybe, as some mentioned, the most important impacts of the decision to hold a summit like this were not the outcomes, but a launch of a process of active discussions and exchanges. The end of WSIS is just the beginning of the real challenge: implementation and reform on various policy levels.

As Murali Shanmugavelan from the Panos Institute explained, the real work lies ahead on two levels. Internationally, some of the debates emerging from WSIS, such as intellectual property rights will be discussed in other inter-governmental forums such as WTO. Nationally, civil society and others will have to take note of the fact that efforts to build an inclusive information society are influenced by many non-civil society instruments. For instance, the right to equality has a direct bearing on women's participation in the information society.

Another point is to really work on including the media in the debate. Panos Institute highlighted it from the beginning, showing the importance of this dynamic on several occasions. They repeat that freedom of expression and information and the fight against corruption have historically been core issues for the traditional media. Ultimately for any of these issues to move forward, the media must be regarded as a key partner in the information society.

It is clear that an international meeting such as WSIS can provide ideas and encouragement, but it cannot force governments to fulfil their promises. As Murali Shanmugavelan underlined, changes at a national level require political will, and civil society has a crucial role in influencing governments and holding them accountable.

One of the next steps will be the Internet Governance Forum in 2006 in Athens.

**Annex Civil Society Statement on the World
Summit on the Information Society**





***"Much more
could have been achieved"***

Civil Society Statement
on the
World Summit on the Information Society

18 December 2005

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I. Introduction – Our Perspective After the WSIS Process

The WSIS was an opportunity for a wide range of actors to work together to develop principles and prioritise actions that would lead to democratic, inclusive, participatory and development-oriented information societies at the local, national and international levels; societies in which the ability to access, share and communicate information and knowledge is treated as a public good and takes place in ways that strengthen the rich cultural diversity of our world.

Civil Society entered the Tunis Phase of WSIS with these major goals:

- Agreement on financing mechanisms and models that will close the growing gaps in access to information and communication tools, capacities and infrastructure that exist between countries, and in many cases within countries and that will enable opportunities for effective ICT uses.
- Agreement on a substantively broad and procedurally inclusive approach to Internet governance, the reform of existing governance mechanisms in accordance with the Geneva principles, and the creation of a new forum to promote multi-stakeholder dialogue, analysis, trend monitoring, and capacity building in the field of Internet governance.
- Ensuring that our human-centred vision of the 'Information Society', framed by a global commitment to human rights, social justice and inclusive and sustainable development, is present throughout the implementation phase.
- Achieving a change of tide in perceptions and practices of participatory decision-making. We saw the WSIS as a milestone from which the voluntary and transparent participation of Civil Society would become more comprehensive and integrated at local, national, regional and global levels of governance and decision making.
- Agreement on strong commitment to the centrality of human rights, especially the right to access and impart information and to individual privacy.

Civil Society affirms that, facing very limited resources, it has contributed positively to the WSIS process, a contribution that could have been even greater had the opportunity been made available for an even more comprehensive participation on our part. Our contribution will continue beyond the Summit. It is a contribution that is made both through constructive engagement and through challenge and critique.

While we value the process and the outcomes, we are convinced much more could have been achieved. We have taken a month after the closure of the Tunis Summit to discuss the outcomes and the process of WSIS. We built on our Geneva 2003 Civil Society Summit Declaration "Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs", and we evaluated the experiences and lessons learned in the four years of WSIS I and WSIS II. This statement was developed in a global online consultation process. It is presented as Civil Society's official contribution to the Summit outcomes.

The issues of greatest concern to Civil Society are addressed in sections II and III of this statement. For most of these items, minor achievements in the outcomes from WSIS were offset by major shortcomings, with much remaining to be done. Some of our greatest concerns involve what we consider to be insufficient attention or inadequate recommendations concerning people-centred issues such as the degree of attention paid to human rights and freedom of expression, the financial mechanisms for the promotion of development that was the original impetus for the WSIS process, and support for capacity building. In section IV, we lay out the first building blocks of Civil Society's "Tunis Commitment". Civil Society has every intention to remain involved in the follow-up and implementation processes after the Tunis summit. We trust governments realize that our participation is vital to achieve a more inclusive and just Information Society.

II. Issues Addressed During the Tunis Phase of WSIS

Social Justice, Financing and People-Centred Development

The broad mandate for WSIS was to address the long-standing issues in economic and social development from the newly emerging perspectives of the opportunities and risks posed by the revolution in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). The summit was expected to identify and articulate new development possibilities and paradigms being made possible in the Information Society, and to evolve public policy options for enabling and realising these opportunities. Overall, it is impossible not to conclude that WSIS has failed to live up to these expectations. The Tunis phase in particular, which was presented as the "summit of solutions", did not provide concrete achievements to meaningfully address development priorities.

While the summit did discuss the importance of new financing mechanisms for ICT for Development (ICTD), it failed to recognize that ICTD presents a challenge beyond that of traditional development financing. Nor did the Tunis fully comprehend that new means and sources of financing and the exploration of new models and mechanisms are required.

Investments in ICTD - in infrastructure, capacity building, appropriate software and hardware and in developing applications and services - underpin all other processes of development innovation, learning and sharing, and should be seen in this light. Though development resources are admittedly scarce and have to be allocated with care and discretion, ICTD financing should not be viewed as directly in competition with the financing of other developmental sectors. Financing ICTD should be considered a priority at both national and international levels, with specific approaches to each country according to its level of development and with a long-term perspective adapted to a global vision of development and sharing within the global community.

Financing ICTD requires social and institutional innovation, with adequate mechanisms for transparency, evaluation, and follow-up. Financial resources need to be mobilised at all levels - local, national and international, including through the realization of ODA commitments agreed to in the Monterrey Consensus and including assistance to programs and activities whose short-term sustainability cannot be immediately demonstrated because of the low level of resources available as their starting point.

Internet access, for everybody and everywhere, especially among disadvantaged populations and in rural areas, must be considered as a global public good. In many cases market approaches are unlikely to address the connectivity needs of particularly disadvantaged regions and populations. In many such areas, initial priority may need to be given to the provision of more traditional ICTs - radio, TV, video and telephony - while the conditions are developed for ensuring the availability of complete Internet connectivity. Info-structure and development often require attention to the development of more traditional infrastructure as well such as roads and electricity.

While the summit in general has failed to agree on adequate funding for ICTD, Civil Society was able to introduce significant sections in the Tunis Commitment (paragraph 35) and in the Tunis Agenda (paragraph 21) on the importance of public policy in mobilizing resources for financing. This can serve as a balance to the market-based orientation of much of the text on financing.

The potential of ICT as tools for development, and not merely tools for communication, by now should have been realised by all states. National ICT strategies should be closely related to national strategies for development and poverty eradication. Aid strategies in developed countries should include clear guidelines for the incorporation of ICT into all aspects of development. In this way ICTs should be integrated into general development

assistance and in this way contribute to the mobilisation of additional resources and an increase in the efficiency of development assistance.

We welcome the launch of the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) in March 2005 and take note of the support it got both from the United Nations and the Tunis Summit. Nevertheless, taking into account that the DSF was established on a voluntarily basis, we are concerned that there are no clear commitments from governments and the private sector to provide the needed material support to ensure the success of this fund. We invite all partners from the governmental and the private sector to commit themselves to the so-called "Geneva Principle" where each ICT contract concluded by a public administration with a private company includes a one percent contribution to the DSF. We particularly encourage local and regional administrations to adopt this principle and welcome the relevant statement made by the World Summit of Cities and Local Authorities in Bilbao, November 2005, on the eve of WSIS II.

Human Rights

The Information Society must be based on human rights as laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes civil and political rights, as well as social, economic and cultural rights. Human rights and development are closely linked. There can be no development without human rights, no human rights without development.

This has been affirmed time and again, and was strongly stated in the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. It was also affirmed in the WSIS 2003 Declaration of Principles. All legislation, policies, and actions involved in developing the global Information Society must respect, protect and promote human rights standards and the rule of law.

Despite the Geneva commitment to an Information Society respectful of human rights, there is still a long way to go. A number of human rights were barely addressed in the Geneva Declaration of Principles. This includes the cross-cutting principles of non-discrimination, gender equality, and workers' rights. The right to privacy, which is the basis of autonomous personal development and thus at the root of the exertion of many other fundamental human rights, is only mentioned in the Geneva Declaration as part of "a global culture of cyber-security". In the Tunis Commitment, it has disappeared, to make room for extensive underlining of security needs, as if privacy were a threat to security, whereas the opposite is true: privacy is an essential requirement for security. The summit has also ignored our demand that the principle of the privacy and integrity of the vote be ensured if and when electronic voting technologies are used.

Other rights were more explicitly addressed, but are de facto violated on a daily basis. This goes for freedom of expression, freedom of information, freedom of association and assembly, the right to a fair trial, the right to education, and the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of the individual and his or her family.

Furthermore, as the second WSIS phase has amplified, a formal commitment is one thing, implementation is something else. Side events open to the general public were organised by civil society both at the Geneva and Tunis Summit, consistent with a long tradition in the context of UN summits. In Tunis, the initiative by parts of civil society to organize a "Citizens' Summit on the Information Society" was prevented from happening. At the Geneva Summit, the "We Seize" event was closed down and then reopened. This is a clear reminder that though governments have signed on to human rights commitments, fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly can not be taken for granted in any part of the world.

The summit has failed to define mechanisms and actions that would actively promote and protect human rights in the Information Society. Post-WSIS there is an urgent need to strengthen the means of human rights enforcement, to ensure the embedding of human rights proofing in national legislation and practises, to strengthen education and

awareness raising in the area of rights-based development, to transform human rights standards into ICT policy recommendations, and to mainstream ICT issues into the global and regional human rights monitoring system – in summary: To move from declarations and commitments into action. Toward this end, an independent commission should be established to review national and international ICT regulations and practices and their compliance with international human rights standards. This commission should also address the potential applications of ICTs for the realization of human rights in the Information Society.

Internet Governance

Civil Society is pleased with the decision to create an Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which it has advocated for since 2003. We also are pleased that the IGF will have sufficient scope to deal with the issues we believe must be addressed, most notably the conformity of existing arrangements with the Geneva Principles, and other cross-cutting or multidimensional issues that cannot be optimally dealt with within current arrangements. However, we reiterate our concerns that the Forum must not be anchored in any existing specialized international organization, meaning that its legal form, finances, and professional staff should be independent. In addition, we reiterate our view that the forum should be more than a place for dialogue. As was recommended by the WGIG Report, it should also provide expert analysis, trend monitoring, and capacity building, including in close collaboration with external partners in the research community.

We are concerned about the absence of details on how this forum will be created and on how it will be funded. We insist that the modalities of the IGF be determined in full cooperation with Civil Society. We emphasize that success in the forum, as in most areas of Internet governance, will be impossible without the full participation of Civil Society. By full participation we mean much more than playing a mere advisory role. Civil Society must be able to participate fully and equally both in plenary and any working or drafting group discussions, and must have the same opportunities as other stakeholders to influence agendas and outcomes.

The Tunis Agenda addressed the issue of political oversight of critical Internet resources in its paragraphs 69 to 71. This, in itself, is an achievement. It is also important that governments recognized the need for the development of a set of Internet-related public policy principles that would frame political oversight of Internet resources. These principles must respect, protect and promote human rights as laid down in international human rights treaties, ensure equitable access to information and online opportunities for all, and promote development.

It is important that governments have established that developing these principles should be a shared responsibility. However, it is very unfortunate that the Tunis Agenda suggests that governments are only willing to share this role and responsibility among themselves, in cooperation with international organisations. Civil Society remains strongly of the view that the formulation of appropriate and legitimate public policies pertaining to Internet governance requires the full and meaningful involvement of non-governmental stakeholders.

With regard to paragraph 40 of the Tunis Agenda, we are disappointed that there is no mention that efforts to combat cyber-crime need to be exercised in the context of checks and balances provided by fundamental human rights, particularly freedom of expression and privacy.

With regard to paragraph 63, we believe that a country code Top Level Domain (ccTLD) is a public good both for people of the concerned country or economy and for global citizens who have various linkages to particular countries. While we recognize the important role of governments in protecting the ccTLDs that refer to their countries or economies, this role must be executed in a manner that respects human rights as

expressed in existing international treaties through a democratic, transparent and inclusive process with full involvement of all stakeholders.

To ensure that development of the Internet and its governance takes place in the public interest, it is important for all stakeholders to better understand how core Internet governance functions – as for example, DNS management, IP address allocation, and others – are carried out. It is equally important that these same actors understand the linkages between broader Internet governance and Internet related matters such as cyber-crime, Intellectual Property Rights, e-commerce, e-government, human rights and capacity building and economic development. The responsibility of creating such awareness should be shared by everyone, including those at present involved in the governance and development of the Internet and emerging information and communication platforms. Equally it is essential that as this awareness develops in newer users of the Internet, older users must be open to the new perspectives that will emerge.

Global governance

A world that is increasingly more connected faces a considerable and growing number of common issues which need to be addressed by global governance institutions and processes. While Civil Society recognises that there are flaws and inefficiencies in the United Nations system that require urgent reform, we believe strongly that it remains most legitimate inter-governmental forum, where rich and poor countries have the same rights to speak, participate, and make decisions together.

We are concerned that during the WSIS it emerged that some governments, especially from developed countries, lack faith in, and appear to be unwilling to invest authority and resources in the present multilateral system, along with concerted efforts to further improve it. We also regret that debates on creating private-public partnerships and new para-institutions within the United Nations have over-shadowed the overall discussion on bridging the digital divide, which in turn has to be linked to a deep reform of the UN and the global economic system.

In our understanding, summits take place precisely to develop the principles that will underpin global public policy and governance structures; to address critical issues, and to decide on appropriate responses to these issues. Shrinking global public policy spaces raise serious questions concerning the kind of global governance toward which we are heading, and what this might mean for people who are socially, economically and politically marginalised: precisely those people who most rely on public policy to protect their interests.

Participation

In the course of four years, as a result of constant pressure from Civil Society, improvements in Civil Society participation in these processes have been achieved, including speaking rights in official plenaries and sub-committees, and ultimately rights to observe in drafting groups. The UN Working Group on Internet Governance created an innovative format where governmental and Civil Society actors worked on an equal footing and Civil Society actually carried a large part of the drafting load.

Due to the pressure of time and the need of governments to interact with Civil Society actors in the Internet Governance field, the resumed session of PrepCom3 was in fact the most open of all. We would like to underline that this openness, against all odds, contributed to reaching consensus.

WSIS has demonstrated beyond any doubt the benefits of interaction between all stakeholders. The innovative rules and practices of participation established in this process will be fully documented to provide a reference point and a benchmark for participants in UN organizations and processes in the future.

Civil Society thanks those governments and international bodies that greatly supported our participation in the WSIS process. We hope and expect that these achievements are taken further and strengthened, especially in more politically contested spaces of global policymaking such as those concerning intellectual property rights, trade, environment, and peace and disarmament.

We note that some governments from developing countries were not actively supportive of greater observer participation believing that that it can lead to undue dominance of debate and opinions by international and developed countries' Civil Society organisations and the private sector. We believe that to change this perception, efforts should be engaged in to strengthen the presence, independence and participation of Civil Society constituencies in and from their own countries.

As for the period beyond the summit, the Tunis documents clearly establish that the soon-to-be created Internet Governance Forum, and the future mechanisms for implementation and follow-up (including the revision of the mandate of the ECOSOC Commission on Science and Technology for Development) must take into account the multi-stakeholder approach.

We want to express concern at the vagueness of text referring to the role of Civil Society. In almost every paragraph talking about multi-stakeholder participation, the phrase "in their respective roles and responsibilities" is used to limit the degree of multi-stakeholder participation. This limitation is due to the refusal of governments to recognize the full range of the roles and responsibilities of Civil Society. Instead of the reduced capabilities assigned in paragraph 35C of the Tunis Agenda that attempt to restrict Civil Society to a community role, governments should have at minima referred to the list of Civil Society roles and responsibilities listed in the WGIG report. These are:

- Awareness raising and capacity building (knowledge, training, skills sharing);
- Promote various public interest objectives;
- Facilitate network building;
- Mobilize citizens in democratic processes;
- Bring perspectives of marginalized groups including for example excluded communities and grassroots activists;
- Engage in policy processes;
- Bring expertise, skills, experience and knowledge in a range of ICT policy areas contributing to policy processes and policies that are more bottom-up, people-centred and inclusive;
- Research and development of technologies and standards;
- Development and dissemination of best practices;
- Helping to ensure that political and market forces are accountable to the needs of all members of society;
- Encourage social responsibility and good governance practice;
- Advocate for development of social projects and activities that are critical but may not be 'fashionable' or profitable;
- Contribute to shaping visions of human-centred information societies based on human rights, sustainable development, social justice and empowerment.

Civil Society has reason for concern that the limited concessions obtained in the last few days before the summit, from countries that previously refused the emergence of a truly multi-stakeholder format, will be at risk in the coming months. Civil Society actors therefore intend to remain actively mobilized. They need to proactively ensure that not only the needed future structures be established in a truly multi-stakeholder format, but also that the discussions preparing their mandates are conducted in an open, transparent and inclusive manner, allowing participation of all stakeholders on an equal footing. Civil Society hopes to be given the means to ensure all its representatives from different regions, languages and cultures, from developed and developing countries, can fully participate.

III. Issues Addressed in the Geneva and Tunis Phases

Gender Equality

Equal and active participation of women is essential, especially in decision-making. This includes all forums that will be established in relation to WSIS and the issues it has taken up. With that, there is a need for capacity building that is focussed on women's engagement with the shaping of an Information Society at all levels, including policy making on infrastructure development, financing, and technology choice.

There is a need for real effort and commitment to transforming the masculinist culture embedded within existing structures and discourses of the Information Society which serves to reinforce gender disparity and inequality. Without full, material and engaged commitment to the principle of gender equality, women's empowerment and non-discrimination, the vision of a just and equitable Information Society cannot be achieved.

Considering the affirmation of unequivocal support for gender equality and women's empowerment expressed in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and paying careful attention to Paragraph 23 of the Tunis Commitment, all government signatories must ensure that national policies, programmes and strategies developed and implemented to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society demonstrate significant commitment to the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment.

We emphasise that financial structures and mechanisms need to be geared towards addressing the gender divide, including the provision of adequate budgetary allocations. Comprehensive gender-disaggregated data and indicators have to be developed at national levels to enable and monitor this process. We urge all governments to take positive action to ensure that institutions and practices, including those of the private sector, do not result in discrimination against women. Governments that are parties to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are in fact bound to this course of action.

Culture, Knowledge, and the Public Domain

Each generation of humankind is depending upon its predecessors to leave them with a liveable, sustainable and stable environment. The environment we were discussing throughout the WSIS is the public domain of global knowledge. Like our planet with its natural resources, that domain is the heritage of all humankind and the reservoir from which new knowledge is created. Limited monopolies, such as copyrights and patents were originally conceived as tools to serve that public domain of global knowledge to the benefit of humankind. Whenever society grants monopolies, a delicate balance must be struck: Careless monopolization will make our heritage unavailable to most people, to the detriment of all.

It has become quite clear that this balance has been upset by the interests of the rights-holding industry as well as the digitalization of knowledge. Humankind now has the power to instantaneously share knowledge in real-time, without loss, and at almost no cost. Civil Society has worked hard to defend that ability for all of humankind.

Free Software is an integral part of this ability: Software is the cultural technique and most important regulator of the digital age. Access to it determines who may participate in a digital world. While in the Geneva phase, WSIS has recognised the importance of Free Software, it has not acted upon that declaration and this recognition faded in the Tunis phase. In the Tunis Commitment, Free Software is presented as a software model next to proprietary software, but paragraph 29 reiterates "the importance of proprietary software in the markets of the countries." This ignores that a proprietary software market is always striving towards dependency and monopolization, both of which are detrimental to economy and development as a whole. Proprietary software is under

exclusive control of and to the benefit of its proprietor. Furthermore: Proprietary software is often written in modern sweat-shops for the benefit of developed economies, which are subsidized at the expense of developing and least-developed countries in this way.

While WSIS has somewhat recognised the importance of free and open source software, it has not asserted the significance of this choice for development. It is silent on other issues like open content (which goes beyond open access in the area of academic publications), new open telecom paradigms and community-owned infrastructure as important development enablers.

The WSIS process has failed to introduce cultural and linguistic diversity as a cross-cutting issue in the Information Society. The Information Society and its core elements - knowledge, information, communication and the information and communication technologies (ICT) together with related rules and standards - are cultural concepts and expressions. Accordingly, culturally defined approaches, protocols, proceedings and obligations have to be respected and culturally appropriate applications developed and promoted. In order to foster and promote cultural diversity it must be ensured that no one has to be a mere recipient of Western knowledge and treatment. Therefore development of the cultural elements of the Information Society must involve strong participation by all cultural communities. The WSIS has failed to recognize the need for developing knowledge resources to shift the current lack of diversity, to move from the dominant paradigm of over-developed nations and cultures to the need for being open to learning and seeing differently.

Indigenous Peoples, further to self-determination and pursuant to their traditional and customary laws, protocols, rules and regulations, oral and written, provide for the access, use, application and dissemination of traditional and cultural knowledge, oral histories, folklore and related customs and practices. WSIS has failed to protect these from exploitation, misuse and appropriation by third parties. As a result, the traditional knowledge, oral histories, folklore and related customs, practices and representations have been and continue to be exploited by both informal and formal (being copyright, trademark and patent) means, with no benefits to the rightful Indigenous holders of that knowledge.

Education, Research, and Practice

If we want future generations to understand the real basis of our digital age, freedom has to be preserved for the knowledge of humankind: Free Software, open courseware and free educational as well as scientific resources empower people to take their life into their own hands. If not, they will become only users and consumers of information technologies, instead of active participants and well informed citizens in the Information Society. Each generation has a choice to make: Schooling of the mind and creativity, or product schooling? Most unfortunately, the WSIS has shown a significant tendency towards the latter.

We are happy that universities, museums, archives, libraries have been recognized by WSIS as playing an important role as public institutions and with the community of researchers and academics. Unfortunately, telecenters are missing in the WSIS documents. Community informatics, social informatics, telecenters and human resources such as computer professionals, and the training of these, have to be promoted, so that ICT serves training and not training serves ICT. Thus special attention must be paid to supporting sustainable capacity building with a specific focus on research and skills development. In order to tackle development contexts training should have a sociological focus too and not be entirely technologically framed.

Problems of access, regulation, diversity and efficiency require attention to power relations both in the field of ICT policy-making and in the everyday uses of ICT. Academic research should play a pivotal role in evaluating whether ICT meets and serves the individuals' and the public's multiple needs and interests - as workers, women,

migrants, racial, ethnic and sexual minorities, among others - across very uneven information societies throughout the world. Furthermore, because power relations and social orientations are often embedded in the very designs of ICT, researchers should be sensitive to the diverse and multiple needs of the public in the technological design of ICT. Similarly, educators at all levels should be empowered to develop curricula that provide or contribute to training for people not only as workers and consumers using ICT, but also in the basic science and engineering of ICT, in the participatory design of ICT by communities with computing professionals, the critical assessment of ICT, the institutional and social contexts of their development and implementation, as well as their creative uses for active citizenship. Young people - given their large numbers, particularly in developing countries, and enthusiasm and expertise in the use of ICTs - remain an untapped resource as initiators of peer-to-peer learning projects at the community and school levels. These issues have largely been ignored by WSIS.

The actors that need to be involved in the process of making this vision a reality are the professionals and researchers, the students and their families, the support services and human resources of the resources centres, politicians at all levels, social organizations and NGOs, but also the private sector. However, in the teaching profession, it is necessary to recognize and accept the need for learning and evolution with regards to ICT.

We emphasize the special role that the computing, information science, and engineering professions have in helping to shape the Information Society to meet human needs. Their education must encourage socially-responsible practices in the design, implementation, and operation of ICT. The larger Information Society has an equally important and corresponding role to play by participating in the design of ICT. We, therefore, encourage increased cooperation between the computing, information science, and engineering professions and end-users of ICTs, particularly communities.

We furthermore have repeatedly underlined the unique role of ICT in socio-economic development and in promoting the fulfilment of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. This is not least true in the reference to access to information and universal primary education. To secure the fulfilment of these goals, it is of key importance that the issue of ICT as tools for the improvement of education is also incorporated in the broader development strategies at both national and international levels.

Media

We are pleased that the principle of freedom of expression has been reaffirmed in the WSIS II texts and that they echo much of the language of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While we note that the Tunis Commitment recognises the place of the media in a new Information Society, this should never have been in question.

In the future, representatives of the media should be assured a place in all public forums considering development of the Internet and all other relevant aspects of the Information Society. As key actors in the Information Society, the media must have a place at the table, and this must be fully recognized both by governments and by Civil Society itself.

While recognizing media and freedom of expression, the WSIS documents are weak on offering support for developing diversity in the media sector and for avoiding a growing concentration and uniformity of content. They specifically neglect a range of projects and initiatives which are of particular value for Civil Society and which need a favourable environment: Community media, telecenters, grassroots and Civil Society-based media. These media empower people for independent and creative participation in knowledge-building and information-sharing. They represent the prime means for large parts of the world population to participate in the Information Society and should be an integral part

of the public policy implementation of the goals of the Geneva Declaration, which refers to the promotion of the diversity of media and media ownership.

The WSIS documents also mostly focus on market-based solutions and commercial use. Yet the Internet, satellite, cable and broadcast systems all utilize public resources, such as airwaves and orbital paths. These should be managed in the public interest as publicly owned assets through transparent and accountable regulatory frameworks to enable the equitable allocation of resources and infrastructure among a plurality of media including community media. We reaffirm our commitment that commercial use of these resources begins with a public interest obligation.

Health Information

Access to health information and knowledge is essential to collective and individual human development and has been identified as a critical factor in the public health care crises around the world. The WSIS process has neglected to recognize that health is a cross-cutting issue and that health systems must include a holistic approach which is integral to the promotion of health and the prevention and treatment of illness for all people and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It is important to recognize that health expertise and scientific knowledge is essential to aid disease stricken, as well as traumatized populations affected by war, terrorism, disaster and other events, and further that the implementation of ICT systems for physical and mental health information and services must be a two-way path recognizing cultural and community norms and values.

It is essential that health care specialists, practitioners, and consumers participate in the development of public policy addressing privacy and related issues regarding health information affecting information and delivery systems.

Children and Young People in the Information Society

In WSIS Phase I, the Geneva Declaration of Principles explicitly acknowledged young people, in paragraph 11, as the "future workforce and leading creators and earliest adopters of ICTs" and that to fully realize this end, youth must be "empowered as learners, developers, contributors, entrepreneurs and decision-makers." The Tunis Commitment in paragraph 25 reaffirmed the strategic role of youth as stakeholders and partners in creating an inclusive Information Society. This recognition is further supported by paragraph 90 of the Tunis Agenda. However we are concerned as to how key decision-makers from Governments, the business community and Civil Society will realize this commitment when the existing structures are not open for genuine, full and effective participation by youth. None of the Tunis documents, specifically in the post-WSIS implementation and follow-up parts, clearly defines how youth shall be "actively engaged in innovative ICT-based development programmes and ... in e-strategy processes," as paragraph 25 states. In this regard, we call upon governments, both national and local, and the proponents of the Digital Solidarity Fund, to engage young people as digital opportunities are created and national e-strategies developed. Youth must be tapped as community leaders and volunteers for ICT for Development projects and be consulted in global and national ICT policy-making processes and formulation.

While we support the great opportunities that ICTs offer children and young people, articles 90q of the Tunis Agenda and article 24 of the Tunis Commitment outline the potential dangers that children and young people face in relation to ICTs. For this reason, article 92 of the Tunis Agenda encourages all governments to support an easy to remember, free of charge, national number for all children in need of care and protection. However, we had hoped that WSIS would have encouraged every stakeholder to support a more comprehensive proposal that ensured that every child, especially those that are marginalized and disadvantaged, has free access to ICTs, including but not limited to, toll free landlines, mobile telephones and Internet connection. In this regard, strategies

should be developed that allow children and young people to reap the benefits that ICTs offer by making ICT an integral part of the formal and informal education sectors. There should also be strategies that protect children and young people from the potential risks posed by new technologies, including access to inappropriate content, unwanted contact and commercial pressures, particularly with regards to pornography, pedophilia and sexual trafficking, while fully respecting human rights standards on freedom of expression. We are committed to work in the WSIS follow-up process towards a world where telecommunication allows children and young people to be heard one-by-one and, through their voices, to fulfil their rights and true potential to shape the world.

Ethical Dimensions

The Tunis texts would have clearly been stronger if the aspects of the Information Society being people-centred, human rights-based and sustainable development-oriented were seen as the ethical point of departure in human relationships and community building and equally in bodies of international agreements. These ethical dimensions are foundational to a just, equitable and sustainable information and knowledge society.

Geneva identified the ethical values of respect for peace and the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature as enunciated in the Millennium Declaration. Tunis should have improved on these by including the principles of trust, stewardship and shared responsibility together with digital solidarity. The technologies we develop, and the solidarities we forge, must build relationships and strengthen social cohesion

Human rights conventions, for example, are critically important in evaluating ICTs so that they are tools to enable just and peaceable conditions for humanity. But Tunis failed to point in this direction. It did not, for example, restate what Geneva considered as acts inimical to the Information Society such as racism, intolerance, hatred, violence and others.

The strong emphasis on technology in the Tunis texts must not eclipse the human being as the subject of communication and development. Our humanity rests in our capacity to communicate with each other and to create community. It is in the respectful dialogue and sharing of values among peoples, in the plurality of their cultures and civilizations, that meaningful and accountable communication thrives. The Tunis texts did not give clear indications on how this can happen.

In an age of economic globalization and commodification of knowledge, the ethics and values of justice, equity, participation and sustainability are imperative. Beyond Tunis, all stakeholders must be encouraged to weave ethics and values language into the working on semantic web knowledge structures. Communication rights and justice are about making human communities as technology's home and human relationships as technology's heart.

IV. Where to Go From Here – Our Tunis Commitment

Civil Society is committed to continuing its involvement in the future mechanisms for policy debate, implementation and follow-up on Information Society issues. To do this, Civil Society will build on the processes and structures that were developed during the WSIS process.

Element One: Evolution of Our Internal Organization

Civil Society will work on the continued evolution of its current structures. This will include the use of existing thematic caucuses and working groups, the possible creation of new caucuses, and the use of the Civil Society Plenary, the Civil Society Bureau, and the Civil Society Content and Themes Group. We will organise, at a date to be determined, to launch the process of creating a Civil Society charter.

Element Two: Involvement in the Internet Governance Forum

The Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus will actively participate in and support the work of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), and is exploring ways to enhance its working methods and its engagement with relevant stakeholders, especially the research community, to these ends. In addition, the caucus is considering the creation of a new Working Group that will make recommendations on the IGF, and other Civil Society caucuses, and individual Civil Society Working Groups will develop ideas for and participate in the IGF as well.

Element Three: Involvement in Follow-Up and Implementation

In order to ensure that future implementation and follow-up mechanisms respect the spirit and letter of the Tunis documents and that governments uphold the commitments they have made during this second phase of the WSIS, Civil Society mechanisms will be used and created to ensure:

- the proactive monitoring of and participation in the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda at the national level;
- a structured interaction with all UN agencies and international organisations and regional as well as national mechanisms for follow-up, to ensure that they integrate the WSIS objectives in their own work plans, and that they put in place effective mechanisms for multi-stakeholder interaction, as mentioned in paragraphs 100 and 101 of the Tunis Agenda;
- that the Information Society as a complex social political phenomenon is not reduced to a technology-centred perspective. The ECOSOC Commission on Science and Technology for Development will have to change significantly its mandate and composition to adequately address the need for being an effective follow-up mechanism for WSIS while re-affirming its original mission of developing science and technology, in addition to ICT, for the development objectives of poor countries;
- not only that the reformed Commission on Science and Technology for Development becomes a truly multi-stakeholder commission for the Information Society, but also, that the process to revise its mandate, composition and agenda is done in a fully open and inclusive manner.

Element Four: Lessons Learned for the UN System in General

We see the WSIS process as an experience to be learned from for the overall UN system and related processes. We will therefore work with the United Nations and all stakeholders on:

- developing clearer and less bureaucratic rules of recognition for accrediting Civil Society organisations in the UN system, for instance in obtaining ECOSOC status and summit accreditation, and to ensure that national governmental recognition of Civil Society entities is not the basis for official recognition in the UN system; and

- ensuring that all future summit processes be multi-stakeholder in their approach, allowing for appropriate flexibility. This would be achieved either by recognition of precedents set in summit processes, or by formulating a rules of procedure manual to guide future summit processes and day-to-day Civil Society interaction with the international community.

Element five: Outreach to Other Constituencies

The civil society actors that actively participated in the WSIS process are conscious that the Information Society, as its name suggests, is a society-wide phenomenon, and that advocacy on Information Society issues need to include every responsible interest and group. We therefore commit ourselves in the post-WSIS period to work to broaden our reach to include different Civil Society constituencies that for various reasons have not been active in the WSIS process; may have shown scepticism over the role of ICT in their core areas of activity; or for other reasons have remained disengaged from the Information Society discourse.