

GLOBAL NETWORK FOR JUSTICE

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World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) “Connecting the World”

The Summit has been endorsed by the UN General Assembly and will take place under the patronage of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary- General, with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) taking the lead role in its preparation.

The Summit will be held in two phases. The first phase will take place in Geneva to be hosted by the Government of Switzerland from 10 to 12 December 2003. The second phase will take place in Tunis to be hosted by the Government of Tunisia, from 16 to 18 November 2005.

3 Goals of the Summit

Raise awareness among world leaders of the implications of the information society.

Get the firm commitment of the world leaders to tackle the injustice of the digital divide.

Develop new legal and policy frameworks appropriate to cyberspace.

Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the lead United Nations organizing agency of WSIS said, “The importance of communications and access to networks is no longer just a technical matter, but a fundamental policy goal of every nation.”

“The Information Society should respect peace and uphold the fundamental values of freedom..... The widest possible protection should be accorded to the family and to enable it to play its crucial role in society.”

Plan of Action Targets Aligned with the Millennium Development Goals

The Draft Plan of Action sets the indicative targets improving connectivity and access in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in promoting the objectives of the Plan of Action to be achieved by 2015:

- a) to connect villages with ICTs and establish community access points;
- b) to connect universities, colleges, secondary schools and primary schools with ICTs;
- c) to connect scientific and research centers with ICTs;
- d) to connect public libraries, cultural museums, post offices and archives with ICTs;
- e) to connect health centers and hospitals with ICTs;
- f) to connect all local and central government departments and establish websites and email addresses;
- g) to adapt all primary and secondary curricula to meet the challenges of Information Society, taking into account national circumstances;
- h) to ensure that all of the world’s population have access to television and radio services;

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Visit WSIS WEBSITE at
<http://www.itu.int/wsis>

- i) to encourage the development of content and to put in place technical conditions in order to facilitate the presence and use of all world languages on the internet;
- ii) to ensure that more than half of the world's inhabitants have access to ICTs within their reach.

Major Issues

Issues that are still to be resolved following Prep-Com 3 include financing, Internet security and Internet governance.

Under review are ways to stimulate investment and fund development. Views differed on whether to use existing financing mechanisms can better be leveraged.

The role of different software models in ensuring access for all to information and knowledge has raised intense debate. Many countries feel that "propriety" software solutions – that are copyright protected – are not the optimum solution to meet all users' needs. The importance of striking the balance between ensuring freedom of access to information, and protecting and stimulating innovation has also been recognized. The debate around Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) relating to Internet content is still going strong.

Several countries raised Internet governance and security as fundamental issues calling for global cooperation. However, there is considerable disagreement regarding the ways in which this should be done. In recent years, the roles of intergovernmental, i.e. with multilateral cooperation between governments, and international bodies, i.e. organizations of international scope, in managing international-level Internet policy issues have been the subject of much international debate. This Summit is helping to focus international attention more firmly on this issue with the involvement of all stakeholders.

Making Technology More "Human"

Initially considered by some to be "technical" in approach, the two documents have been redrafted to contain numerous additions on the family, disadvantaged groups, developing country, rural and remote communities, capacity building, training and education, and local content development adapted to indigenous cultures.

Participants called for action lines that would further the empowerment of women and benefit the least developed countries (LDCs) through the use of ICTs. The importance of learning and skills acquisition, in particular for young people, girls, women in developing country populations and vulnerable groups.

Draft Declaration of Principles:
Building the Information Society:
Global Challenge in the New Millennium, November 14, 2003 is available at the WSIS website.

Excerpts from Draft Declaration of Principles; Principle 10) Ethical dimension of the Information Society

#53. The Information Society should respect peace and uphold the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature.

#54. We acknowledge the importance of ethics for the Information Society, which should foster justice, and the dignity and worth of the human person. The widest possible protection should be accorded to the family and to enable it to play its crucial role in society.

#55. The use of ICTs [and content creation] should respect human rights and fundamental freedoms of others, including personal privacy, and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion [in conformity with relevant international instruments].