



WFUNA Task Force on WSIS



Position Paper:

Empowerment through Networking



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In the summer of 2003, on the initiative of the UNA of Denmark, representatives from seven United Nations Associations (UNAs) established a task force on the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) under the auspices of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA). The UNAs of China, Denmark, Ecuador, Mozambique, Pakistan, Uganda and Venezuela were joined by the WFUNA Secretariat and the World Federalist Movement (WFM) to constitute the WFUNA Task Force on WSIS. The Task Force has ever since been coordinated by the UNA of Denmark.

The objective of the WFUNA Task Force on WSIS is twofold: firstly to create opportunities for UNAs to participate in

*and influence the official WSIS process, and secondly to provide each participating UNA with opportunities and capacities to gain experience through international networking, thereby enabling them to further develop their own organisation and increase their public outreach. The Task Force has fully participated in the processes of both phases of the WSIS and witnessed opportunities for Civil Society to participate in and influence international cooperation within the UN system. Networking at local, regional and international level has been a vital part of the work of the Task Force and has empowered each organisation in innovative ways. Thus, **empowerment through networking** has become the primary strategy for collaboration by the WFUNA Task Force on WSIS.*

Preamble

This position paper is premised on the experiences of the participation of the WFUNA Task Force in the WSIS process.

We contend that for a meaningful and inclusive Information Society to be achieved globally, information and communication technologies must be deployed for the full exercise of Human Rights for all and the eradication of poverty in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Therefore, this position paper stresses the importance of access for all, both in relation to basic and technical infrastructure and to a rights-based approach. Governments must be accountable for providing ICT access to all as a public good, and all stakeholders must partake in the endeavours to ensure that equal access to information and knowledge obtained through ICTs is achieved, and that unreached or underserved areas and groups are considered when developing global ICT initiatives. The right to information and knowledge and the right to freedom of expression should be results of efforts to achieve these goals. It is also of key importance to ensure that basic infrastructure, including necessary technological infrastructure, is established and that connectivity costs are kept at a level that does not exclude anyone from accessing the Information Society.

Based on these points of reference, this position paper focuses on four elements of the Information Society: 1) access for all, 2) mainstreaming of ICTs in development practices, 3) follow-up to the WSIS process, and 4) Human Rights. These issues address

specific concerns corresponding to the fields of interest and competencies of the Task Force.

1. Access for All

Universal access to information and knowledge is indispensable for ensuring a meaningful and inclusive Information Society and bridging the digital divide. To guarantee access for all, due consideration must be given to basic and technical infrastructure as well as the rights-based issues.

Consequently, the WFUNA Task Force on WSIS emphasises these minimum starting points in order to guarantee the position of access to information, knowledge and communication as global public goods:

- ✘ Expediently set up high-speed Internet backbones that facilitate the establishment of easily accessible Internet exchange points at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels. This is especially urgent for regions, which have no Internet backbone at all.
- ✘ Immediately institute concrete multi-stakeholder approaches for the development, implementation and monitoring of national ICT strategies and plans.
- ✘ Urgently invest in the development of basic infrastructure that ensures universal ICT access and pays special attention to supporting sustainable capacity building with specific focus on research and skills development. This must particularly target the unreached

and marginalized areas, communities and groups.

- ✘ Ensure that all internet governance frameworks and structures are flexible and efficient, and are based on an equitable multi-stakeholder approach at all levels, i.e. local, national, regional and international authorities.
- ✘ Integrate, in all Information Society initiatives, the critically important principles of multilingualism and respect for cultural diversity.
- ✘ Establish IP addressing and domain name distribution at the national level in a transparent and democratic structure.
- ✘ Promote wireless technologies where useful and appropriate, with emphasis on utilizing both new and traditional ICTs to ensure complete outreach.

2. Mainstreaming of ICT in development – at all levels

The potential of ICTs as tools for development, and not merely tools for communication, must be realised by all states, wherefore national ICT strategies in developing countries should be closely related to national strategies for development and poverty eradication. Aid strategies in developed countries must also include clear guidelines for incorporation of ICTs. In this respect, we especially wish to address the growing lack of true commitment among developed countries to internationally agreed development targets, including

the Millennium Development Goals, and the insufficient adherence to demands for good governance and democratisation in developing countries. We therefore recommend to:

- ✘ Unify global standards and policies that allow access and flexibility across geographical borders.
- ✘ Mainstream successful ICT-based pilot programmes and share the experiences of best practices as well as worst practices at all levels across all sectors.
- ✘ Adhere to the promise of assigning 0.7 per cent of GDP to official development assistance. The countries who have not met the commitment should establish a timeframe.
- ✘ Use all existing funding mechanisms efficiently, including official development assistance, and promote new and additional funding mechanisms for ICT for development.
- ✘ Establish sound governmental regulatory frameworks and policies to encourage private sector participation in the Information Society.
- ✘ Strengthen measures to mobilize domestic financial and human resources for ICT development.
- ✘ Attract investment for ICT infrastructure both from public and

private sectors in order to develop enabling environments for human and financial development.

- ✘ Incorporate the future into present planning and mainstreaming of ICTs to allow flexibility for unforeseeable future developments, such as space communications.

3. Follow-up and implementation

At this stage of the WSIS process it is important to continuously insist that for the summit process to be truly successful, the follow-up and implementation of Summit decisions must be efficient and truly inclusive, with each stakeholder fulfilling their roles. In addition, while it is of key importance that implementation must take place at both regional and national level, an international structure must be in place to guide these efforts, serve as a coordination structure, and underscore true global exchange of best practices.

Moreover, this summit process has set a unique precedent for multi-stakeholder participation. No matter the outcome of the summit or the impact of results, organisation of Civil Society at WSIS should set precedents and help guide future Civil Society participation in future summit processes.

Finally, in this time of UN reform, Civil Society participation at WSIS also factors into the ongoing very crucial discussion of Civil Society interaction with the UN on a broader basis in the future. In this paper we do not propose to cover all

issues related to implementation and follow-up, but have chosen to point out a few crucial recommendations:

- ✘ Establish an appropriate and flexible global coordinating body anchored in the UN system for follow-up and implementation. The forming of such a structure and its content should be guided by relevant input from all stakeholders. This body must help coordinate implementation activities, support the various stakeholders in their exchange of experiences and guide policy debate.
- ✘ Develop clearer and less bureaucratic rules of recognition for accrediting Civil Society organisations in the UN system, for instance on obtaining ECOSOC status and summit accreditation, to ensure that national governmental recognition of Civil Society entities is not the premise for official recognition in the UN system.
- ✘ Ensure that future summit processes be multi-stakeholder in their approach, allowing for due 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.
- ✘ Institute efficient bench-marking, measurable mechanisms and monitoring for achieving international, regional, national and local goals for

ICT and development. Specific dates for achievement of these goals must be incorporated in the follow-up and implementation plans of the WSIS process.

4. Human Rights

The protection of Human Rights must be given priority above that of information and communication technologies. Accordingly, information and communication technologies should contribute to universal implementation and protection of all Human Rights established in the international, regional and national standards. Furthermore, ICTs must avoid violating existing implemented rights, postponing or preventing the implementation of Human Rights instruments, and limiting or preventing the exercise of Human Rights.

ICTs must therefore uphold the universality of Human Rights and support all rights equally. To that end we recommend the following:

- ✘ Develop public policies that safeguard and protect the privacy and freedom of expression of all human beings.
- ✘ Establish legal standards to protect Human Rights, especially those of consumers at international, regional, national and local levels in order to increase public trust.

On a more specific note, we wish to draw attention to the important and neglected

issue of electronic voting. Societies that lack effective systems of checks and balances or face corruption are more likely to be vulnerable to the possibility of manipulation in an electronic voting process, but even technologically advanced societies feel this issue is dangerous ground because of this risk. Added to that are mechanisms of ID verification (fingerprinting for voter ID) in a serial process that allow or even threaten the possibility of deciphering the way an individual has voted. This may seriously affect how the individual votes and therefore affect voting patterns and results. The right to vote and privacy of that vote is an important tenet for democracy and the introduction of new technology in the voting process should avoid installing fear, which would, in effect, annul the right to vote. Therefore, we recommend to:

- ✘ Establish international, national and local measures that ensure that the right to an open and transparent voting process is guaranteed and that the privacy of the vote is fully and completely protected if and when electronic voting technologies are implemented.

If the existing Human Rights package for the WSIS process covers most pertinent issues on paper, we, Civil Society along with other stakeholders, must turn our energies to effect genuine implementation, protection and enforcement of these rights at the Summit in Tunis, and thereafter.