

**Civil Society Plenary Statement on Rules of Procedure,
Accreditation and Modalities for NGO participation.**

5 July 2002 Final Statement, Geneva.

Civil Society representatives at this first Preparatory Committee Meeting welcome the declared intention to include all stakeholders, expressed by so many at the opening and in speeches. We further appreciate the huge effort from all parties that went into reaching formal agreement on the PrepCom Rules of Procedures and specific modalities. The following is our response to the outcomes, approved at the Final Civil Society Plenary Meetings and initially endorsed by the organisations attached below. Further endorsements are being added.

Civil Society Participation in the WSIS: Rules and Modalities

Statements from all sides raised high hopes that accredited NGO participants would be offered innovative and effective modalities to participate in this Summit at all levels, formally and informally. Although the ITU itself has no accreditation system for NGOs - putting it out of line with most UN agencies and with ECOSOC regulations – it has all along stated its determination to maximise participation.

The starting point for civil society was that the WSIS must build on acquired rights and practices of participation in UN Summits, and could not erode or dilute these. *In the most optimistic interpretation, this agreement on rules and modalities for participation represents a variation on established practices, but little in the way of positive innovation*, such as those seen in the UNESCO series of consultations with civil society and private sector organisations (see PrepCom doc wsis/pc-1/contr/1, pp 29-30), and at the Bamako Regional Conference (Doc wsis/pc-1/doc/7 p2).

We are naturally very disappointed that the broader framework offered by Option B in Rule 55 was not approved. However, *the proposals in the document on participation are welcomed as potentially constructive and useful modalities* (but see accreditation below). It is vital that the degree of flexibility retained, which is welcomed, must be *fully exercised in the direction of supporting participation* if this potential is to be realised.

The capacity of these proposals to support effective participation of civil society will depend both on solid commitment and open cooperation of all participants, and on the practicalities and concrete circumstances of their implementation. This must mean *maximum participation of civil society in the design and implementation of these modalities, and in the related formal and informal activities*. Such activities include (but are not restricted to) the determination of the timing, location, duration, and selection of Chairs of Round Tables, and other events; and the nature, extent and determination of participation and participants.

Furthermore, the proposed modalities cannot yield balanced and effective participation of civil society *without transparent, efficient mechanisms for attracting and distributing funds*, from a variety of sources, and the *level of funding must be appropriate* to the need for balanced and effective participation during PrepComs and Summits, and between them.

We accept the ITU Secretary General's reassurance, delivered in a meeting with us today, that he will do everything in his power to maximise civil society participation, and turn these minimal agreements into meaningful effort. He faces a daunting task.

General Issues of Accreditation

Second, the decision on arrangements for accreditation raises a number of important issues. The offer of full accreditation to 'business sector entities', i.e. individual for-profit private corporations, is a radical departure from accepted UN Summit practice. In previous Summits, with just a few possible and disputed exceptions, the private sector was exclusively and ably represented by their

associations. The implications of this decision differ, in the context of the WSIS Summit as distinct from that of the UN System as a whole.

For the UN System this is an extremely disturbing development. Private sector participation, through their various sector and other associations, is a long established practice in UN Summits and the UN system as a whole. A decision to include individual commercial actors in this manner in a UN summit, *without appropriate debate, and reference to established procedures and practices, is unprecedented* and will impact on the entire UN system. Our concern is not necessarily the opening of participation to a new group. It is, first, that the appropriate discussion, negotiation, and reference to regulation and practices have not been followed. Second, *the explicit inclusion directly of for-profit businesses appears to at variance with existing UN Regulation*. Though there are possible individual instances of such inclusion (such as at the FfD in Monterrey), the full legal and practical implications of this rebalancing of formal influence and ongoing erosion of practices, have never been explored, let alone acted upon. We were promised innovation in this Summit. We did not expect that the only significant innovation introduced would be an unwelcome one.

The ITU, whose role is to lead and organise this UN Summit, already includes individual firms as 'sector members'. This is its key mode for non-governmental participation. Inevitably, there was thus significant pressure, and a case to be made, for full incorporation of individual firms. Yet other means could have been found to provide effective participation for non-accredited bodies, which comprise not only for-profit firms but also cities, universities, and others. This has been successfully achieved elsewhere. *There was no pressing need to establish hastily-conceived precedents, or for the failure to observe due process of consultation, discussion and agreement.*

There will be further ripple effects. The decision to accredit for-profit entities raises uncertainties, for instance as to whether private universities can accredit, but not public universities, and so forth. Furthermore, we are concerned that the specific manner in which this was achieved – by providing automatic accreditation for all ITU members whose focus is primarily on infrastructure - will bias the WSIS agenda even further towards technologies and infrastructure. This will, in practice, tend to narrow the agenda.

Finally, the rebalancing of relationships between those entities that exist ultimately for commercial purposes (both for-profit firms and their not-for-profit associations), and those NGOs with social, political, cultural and development aims, must be addressed. The numerical shifts, and the double form of representation now available to the private sector, will require serious consideration and implementation of appropriate corrective action.

The real impact of this precipitous decision on the WSIS will emerge only with time

Conclusion.

With regard to the WSIS, we will continue to engage constructively, between now and the next PrepCom, with the process. We will especially support the Regional Consultations which, with regard to participation, made significant progress at Bamako. At the same time, we will continue to explore all our options for future engagement and action. We will monitor progress and take every opportunity to interact with all stakeholders on the above issues regarding official and unofficial modalities for participation. We believe that only true and effective stakeholder participation, focusing on the real needs of all people and communities, can ensure a successful outcome.

The issues surrounding the accreditation of individual private sector firms go beyond this individual Summit. We believe it has very significant implications for the UN system as a whole, and its modes of operation, and will be taking our concerns to the highest levels within the system, in a number of ways. We shall also engage with ongoing discussions, debates and actions on related questions within the broader civil society, from local to global levels.

This statement is endorsed by the following:

- **Abantu for Development**
- **ALAI: Agencia Latinoamericana de Informacionm**
- **ALER - Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica**
- **AMARC International: World Association of Community Broadcasters,**
- **AMARC: Africa Region**
- **ANAIS AC**
- **APC, Africa.**
- **APC: Association for Progressive Communications**
- **ATUCOM: Association Tunisienne de la Communication**
- **ATUSUT: Association Tunisienne des Services Universels des Télécommunications**
- **BHN Association**
- **Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University**
- **Carrefour Mondial de l'Internet Citoyen**
- **Civil Society Youth Caucus**
- **Communities Online**
- **Community Media Network**
- **Computer Association of Nepal**
- **Comunica**
- **Communication Rights in the Information Society: CRIS campaign**
- **Consumer Federation of America**
- **CPSR:- Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility**
- **CSD PTT: France**
- **ETIC Nord-Sud**
- **FAWCO: Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas**
- **FEMNET: African Women's Development and Communication Network**
- **Foundation for Media Alternatives, Philippines**
- **GCNP: Global Community Networking Partnership**
- **Glocom: Centre for Global Communications**
- **IAMCR: International Association for Media and Communication Research**
- **International Council for Caring Communities**
- **Internews**
- **IRIS – Imaginons un Réseau Internet Solidaire – France**
- **ISIS International – Manila**
- **ISOC: Internet Society**
- **ISOC-Mali**
- **ITEM: Instituto del Tercer Mundo**
- **IWTC: International Women's Tribune Centre**
- **JFMA: International Federation of Multimedia Associations**
- **Leadership Conference on Civil Rights**
- **Media Institute of Southern Africa**
- **NEXUS Research Cooperative**
- **OneWorld**
- **Pacific Telecommunications Council**
- **Pain pour le prochain – Bread for all**
- **Panos Institute, West Africa**
- **SwissMedia: Swissmultimedia Association**
- **Taking IT Global**
- **Telecommunities Canada**
- **Transparency International**
- **WAFUNIF**
- **World Association for Christian Communication**
- **World Council of Churches**
- **World Federalist Movement**
- **Worldview International Foundation/Mandate the Future**

... and the list is growing.