

**CIVIL SOCIETY COORDINATION GROUP**  
**Statement to the Informal Meeting on Content & Themes**  
**Geneva, 16-18 September 2002**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

This document contains the comments and contributions of the coordination of representatives from civil society organizations grouped into sub-committees, caucuses and working groups issued from the final civil society plenary formed during PrepCom1. This statement is our answer to the report presented by the Chairman of Sub-Committee 2 (Content and Themes), containing the two non-papers, respectively on the “Principles guiding the preparatory work and the WSIS” and proposed “Themes for the WSIS”. This document should be considered as our common contribution to the informal meeting on content and themes, convened in Geneva, September 16-18, 2002.

The WSIS offers an unprecedented opportunity for an in depth exchange among a wide range of stakeholders, that could lead to a better and more widely shared understanding of the very diverse challenges and opportunities for human development posed by the “Information Society”, as well as to identify possible dangers. This implies that human needs in the realm of information and communication, and the goals of human development, must be at the heart of the discussions. Only if there are adequate opportunities to confront different perspectives will it be possible to achieve basic consensus on goals and strategies. We understand that this is the spirit in which the Summit was convened and our proposal adopts this spirit.

The coordination of civil society organizations endorsing this document has been somewhat encouraged by the progress on principles and themes with regards to initial proposals. More precisely, we understand that the principles and proposed themes should be considered as guidelines encouraging further developments and concrete proposals to be submitted by all participating groups to governments decisions.

However, we still have a number of major concerns relating to the contents of the two non-papers. These concerns, and our proposals to overcome them are highlighted in the sequel of this statement. We are confident that all these concerns will be taken into account and all these proposals will be reflected in the final report of Sub-Committee 2, showing a common will to achieve consensus and work towards general interest outcomes.

## **2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **2.1 Most of the guiding principles proposed in non-paper 1 are welcomed**

These are:

- *Extension of the benefits of the information and communication society to all, and the necessity of their development-orientation*
- *Need to find a shared understanding and to raise awareness of the information and communication society and to meet the challenges of the digital divide*
- *Priority given to preservation of linguistic diversity and cultural identity*
- *Prevalence of international solidarity and co-operation*
- *Assessment of the fact that ICTs are a tool for achieving economic and social goals, and not an end in itself*
- *Importance of universal and inclusive access*
- *Importance of communities and of utilizing ICTs for the benefit of disadvantaged groups*

We nevertheless insist on the recognition that the digital divide issue should be tackled in its broadest understanding, in order to guarantee democratic and equitable access and participation. This means addressing not only the North/South digital divide but also the enduring inequities within both developed and less developed nations, and generally speaking the political and social barriers, along with technical, educational, gender and economic ones, that are major causes of marginalization.

In addition to “access”, there is a requirement to develop and provide the means for the effective use of ICTs by diverse groups, as providing equitable opportunities to advance and successfully participate in the achievements and benefits of the information and communication society.

Moreover, diverse realities of social groups such as indigenous people, diasporas and migrants, as well as specific needs of groups such as older persons and the disabled, should be addressed.

In addition, we consider that culture is lively and evolving, therefore not only preservation of linguistic diversity and cultural identity, but also fostering their development should be prioritized.

Furthermore, youth contributions to overall development of the information and communication society should be emphasized.

Finally, gender-based analyses and perspectives must be introduced into all proposals, action plans and follow-up programmes, so that gender equality can be guaranteed in the information and communication society, as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

To secure these guiding principles and ensure the achievement of these shared objectives, we consider indispensable the addition of the following principles for the overall work of the Summit.

### **2.2 Human rights and human development are the basis for the WSIS**

The information and communication society must necessarily have people at its center. Human rights and human development must be the fundamental basis for consideration of all other principles, themes and possible outcomes within any UN-sponsored summit. Approaching the information and

communication society from a rights perspective implies putting human dignity, human development and our rights as global citizens above technological considerations or the commercial producer-consumer relationship. Therefore, the goal of the WSIS should be achieved in reference to the Human rights framework established by the United Nations, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and many other documents that have been adopted by member states.

**The lack of a Human Rights Perspective in the proposed WSIS guiding principles remains one of our major concerns.** With this regard, we appreciate the reference already made to the UN Millennium Declaration in non-paper 1. However, we consider that Human rights and human development deserve more than a loose and indirect reference. We therefore insist on the explicit inclusion in the guiding principles, as well as in the final Summit declaration, that:

*Human Rights are a fundamental basis for all developments in an information and communication society. United Nations Millennium Declaration principles, and specially those stated in its section V (Human rights, democracy and good governance) constitute both the framework and the evaluating criterion of these developments.*

### **2.3 The WSIS must recognize that communication is a universal right**

Communication is a fundamental human need, indispensable for the organization of societies. A WSIS that makes human rights a guiding principle for all other thematic discussion must, therefore, take up the concept of communication as a universal human right. Human interaction and the exchange of information and content to facilitate active citizenship – the participation of all individuals and communities in the public space – are missing from most of the proposals we have received.

**The sole reference to Access to information is too restrictive.** People should be recognized in their full quality as citizens, not just consumers nor users of technology and services. The focus should be put on people and the services they require, rather than on services and the people who use them. Participation and communication and effective use concepts should be affirmed. We thus propose that the guiding principles as well as the final Summit declaration include their mention:

*Communication – understood as a participative and interactive process essential to human coexistence, human formation and citizenship and community building – and information-sharing should be the thematic focus of the summit. Technology should be at the service of these.*

### **2.4 Ensuring and extending global information commons**

This is needed to achieve both the reduction of inequalities and the stimulation of intellectual creativity and technological innovation in an Information and Communication society. Furthermore, it should be recognized that the global commons, that have been developed by means of public funding and that derive from our shared physical environment, constitute a public resource, which should not be sold for private profit making. We therefore consider that the guiding principles as well as the final Summit declaration include provisions with this respect:

*Securing and extending Global commons is a major way of bridging the digital divide and of ensuring the minimal equitable conditions for the overall development of intellectual creativity, technological innovation, effective technology use and successful participation in the information and communication society. These are the necessary*

*pre-conditions for realizing the values and principles of Freedom, Equality, Solidarity and Shared responsibility adopted in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.*

## **2.5 Other concerns**

Among the guiding principles proposed in non-paper 1, some remain between brackets, yet to be discussed by Sub-Committee 2. Among them, we note the one stating that “The Summit should consider, in a balanced manner, infrastructure and content issues”. In the light of above points, the coordination of civil society organizations endorsing this document urges Sub-Committee 2 and more generally speaking all government representatives to reaffirm, in the guiding principles as well as in the final Summit declaration that:

*The Summit should consider, in a balanced manner, infrastructure and content issues.*

Another bracketed principle refers to “The importance of the issue of information network security”. We consider this to be a sub-theme, not a principle, and in any case that security issues should not be considered separately from privacy issues.

## **3 THEMES**

The list of themes contained in non-paper 2 cover some of the important aspects of the information and communication society, but do not seem to be clearly defined in a coherent framework. Taking into consideration the inputs to and results of PrepCom1, as well as the principles guiding the summit that we have suggested above, we propose the following categories as a comprehensive framework for WSIS themes. We have attempted to represent in the content of each thematic category discussed below most of the major issues articulated by all participating groups in the WSIS process to this point. The specific issues mentioned do not aim to be exhaustive nor exclusive of other important issues. In this section, the framework and themes are only briefly outlined. For the sake of clarity, specifications and possible sub-themes are developed in an Annex entitled “Elaborating on themes”.

### **3.1 Understanding the information and communication society (conceptual framework)**

In order to fulfill the guiding principle of “The need to find a shared understanding of and to raise awareness of the information and communication society and how the challenges of the digital divide can be met”, it seems important to include this section as part of the agenda.

#### ***3.1.1 The Foundations of the information and communication society***

In this category, the WSIS would develop a shared definition and understanding of the information and communication society: what is it, who and what purposes it should serve, and on what ethical bases it should function.

#### ***3.1.2 Contribution of the information and communication society to the opportunities for human and social development***

As a basis for building a better understanding of the potential and risks of the information and communication society, the WSIS would examine the particular roles and responsibilities the

information and communication society has to play in contributing to development and would evaluate its social impact. The WSIS would also identify the means to ensure the broadest distribution of opportunities for human and social development and effective technology use within an information and communication society and the emerging technology environment on which it is based.

## **3.2 Cross-cutting themes**

### ***3.2.1 Bridging divides and creating opportunities for effective participation in the information and communication society***

Overcoming the barriers to people and countries in accessing, participating and providing opportunities for effective use of the emerging technology environment in the information and communication society should be a concern present in all the themes of the WSIS agenda.

### ***3.2.2 Gender perspectives***

In accordance with the Millennium Declaration, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and other instruments adopted by the UN, the WSIS must address gender perspectives within the information and communication society in all aspects of the agenda.

## **3.3 Developing a framework**

The themes in this group concern the basic conditions for the functioning and development of the information and communication society.

### ***3.3.1 Regulatory and policy framework***

This would look at how the information and communication society should be regulated and developed, within a perspective of fulfilling the objectives of human rights, democracy, development and good governance.

### ***3.3.2 Building the infrastructure***

In this category, the WSIS would focus on the technical aspects of evolving the information and communication society from its present state, including the establishment of technical standards.

### ***3.3.3 Tools, services and applications***

In this category, the WSIS would examine tools, services, and applications in the information and communication society that should be pursued in addressing human needs.

### ***3.3.4 Governance issues***

In this category the WSIS would address issues concerning transparent governance as well as the particulars of governing the information and communication society.

## **3.4 Purposes of the information and communication society**

The themes in this group concern the wherefore of the information and communication society, and as such should be given equal importance to the previous group of themes.

### **3.4.1 Knowledge society**

In this category, the WSIS would address themes that recognize the creation and management of knowledge as the key benefit to humankind of the information and communication society.

### **3.4.2 Developing content**

This category would address the policies, regulations and financing to ensure production and circulation of diverse content.

### **3.4.3 Peoples, communities and rights**

In this category, the WSIS would address the rights of people and communities in the information and communication society, and needs that are not addressed by commercial perspectives on the information and communication society.

The main emphasis here is, on the one hand, to articulate support for people's empowerment and for their full participation in their countries and communities; and on the other hand, to promote community-driven and community-based enabling initiatives including traditional and innovative uses of communication and information management and processing tools at the community level.

## **ENDORSEMENT:**

**On Behalf of the Civil Society Plenary at PrepCom 1  
Interim Civil Society Plenary Coordinating Group**

**Izumi Aizu, Karen Banks, Renate Bloem, Steve Buckley, Sally Burch, Sasha Costanza-Chock, Susanna George, Bruce Girard, Robert Guerra, Richard Jordan, Robyn Kamira, Bill McIver, Olinca Marino, Meryem Marzouki, Emanuel Njenga, Seán Ó Siochrú, Valerie Peugeot, Claire Shearman, Gaurab Raj Upadhaya**

## **4 ANNEX - ELABORATING ON THEMES**

### **4.1 Understanding the information and communication society (conceptual framework)**

#### **4.1.1 The Foundations of the information and communication society**

The primary emphasis here would be on defining the role of human rights in the information and communication society in the context of the United Nations system. Integral to this, the distinct roles of governments, civil society, and the private sector would also be established. The diverse realities of different types of communities in the information and communication society would also be addressed here.

#### ***4.1.2 Contribution of the information and communication society to the opportunities for human and social development***

Themes would include: the creation of economic opportunities; the role of ICTs in health, agriculture, and other life-critical sectors; the role of ICT-based communication for development; building national policies and capacity in developing countries; the roles and impacts of investment and speculation in ICT-based development; the role and limits of E-commerce in development; the impact of ICTs on employment and migration.

### **4.2 Cross-cutting themes**

#### ***4.2.1 Bridging divides and creating opportunities for effective participation in the information and communication society***

This implies explicitly recognizing a complex of different types of barriers, not the proverbial, monolithic “digital divide”, along with the need for creating opportunities for effective participation in the information and communication society through the use of ICTs, including training, finance, sourcing, technology design and others. Major emphasis would be placed on addressing barriers and developing the means to ensure effective participation in all aspects of ICT development on the part of the least developed countries (LDCs).

Other themes addressed here would include: social, economic, and educational barriers; political, cultural and historical barriers; requirements for achieving universal and equitable access; and the distinct roles of governments, civil society, and the private sector in bridging barriers to the information and communication society, as well as means for ensuring effective participation through targeted training, micro-finance and local market development.

#### ***4.2.2 Gender perspectives***

This would imply focusing on the broad themes of reducing gender discrimination and improving participation of women in the information and communication society, capacity building and training for women, and the use of ICTs to improve the lives and livelihoods of women worldwide.

Specific themes would include: supporting wide participation by women ICT specialists in policy and decision making at all levels in the ICT sector; supporting women’s greater access and control over resources necessary for their empowerment; encouraging women to explore the convergence and between cultural and traditional forms of communication with the technologies currently available; enhancing the possibilities of women at all levels utilizing ICT tools to transform gender hierarchies in society and to challenge stereotyped roles that they are expected to fulfill; using new and alternative forms of ICTs to counter the negative portrayal of women in the media, examining and addressing old and new forms of exploitation and violence against women in the information and communication society.

### **4.3 Developing a framework**

#### ***4.3.1 Regulatory and policy framework***

Regulatory themes would include areas such as: freedom of expression; data protection; privacy and network security; privacy in the workplace; consumer protection, specially with regards to spamming and profiling; intellectual property rights, public domain and fair use, public services, the establishment of appropriate policy and market structures and regulating media ownership and concentration; and extending rights of workers and their trade-unions to the use of the internet and

intranets of companies for purpose of communications and solidarity: defining on-line rights for on-line workers is a necessity which includes provisions to protect workers in very intrusive workplaces and unprecedented monitoring and surveillance conditions. Finally, given the borderless characteristics of ICTs, an appropriate framework for establishing the competence of jurisdictions should also be elaborated.

Themes addressing the development of the information and communication society would include: policies for autonomous development of national and regional information societies; securing and extending the global information commons as a major way of bridging the digital divide; sustainable and environmentally responsible development of ICTs as well as the use of ICTs to enable sustainable and environmentally responsible development and conservation efforts worldwide; determining the appropriate use of new and traditional ICTs; capacity building in governments, civil society, and the private sector; financing and deployment of technology; and examination of social and regulatory impacts of this framework.

Recognizing participatory design as an indispensable tool for ICT development, this category should also establish as an integral part of this framework a continuing process for the implementation and review of summit themes and principles, and mechanisms for the implementation, monitoring and enforcement of rights recognized in the information and communication society by the WSIS.

#### **4.3.2 *Building the infrastructure***

Themes would include: the extension of Internet connectivity, wireless technologies, and other advanced ICTs to meet outstanding human needs in all societies; infrastructure needed to extend participation of the developing world in the Information and Communication society; sustainability; continuing support for open source technologies; building bridges between different types of media, including radio, television, print and the Internet; addressing the needs of rural communities; ICTs needed to address emergency situations, as articulated in the Tampere Convention; and supporting the deployment of community radio and television broadcasting sectors.

#### **4.3.3 *Tools, services and applications***

Major thematic subcategories here would include technologies that facilitate active citizenship and improved government; support universal access to knowledge and global communication and cooperation; and the improvement of the standards of living adequate to the health and well being of all people.

Specific themes include: the building of bridges between the media: radio, television, press and Internet; ICTs for E-government, including citizen input into political processes; support for disaster mitigation and relief operations; support for long-term archiving for cultural preservation; and tools to facilitate cross-sector co-operation.

#### **4.3.4 *Governance issues***

Themes would include: democratic management of international bodies dealing with ICTs, including Internet governance; the use of ICTs for administration management and decentralization; building consensus and strengthening governance through ICTs; and enhancing public accountability and transparency through the use of traditional and new forms of ICTs.

Internet governance, with special emphasis on developing and securing global information commons, is a major theme. This includes: the development of common infrastructure and standards; the domain name management system seen as a public service and not as a commercial and financial speculation opportunity; the need for a more balanced regional representation in international bodies dealing with ICTs; the establishment of minimal requirements on Internet international bodies, which should be representative and transparent; and a fair renegotiation of bilateral network interconnections and multilateral peering agreements, towards better balanced and lower cost international route and



hub repartition, instead of the current US- and Euro-centric Internet topography.

## **4.4 Purposes of the information and communication society**

### **4.4.1 *Knowledge society***

Such themes would include: educational goals; distance learning; facilitating both formal and life-long learning; development of information literacy; access to knowledge; support for cultural and linguistic diversity; needs of young people in the knowledge society; addressing the root causes of the technological and intellectual brain drain from developing countries; capacity building in academia to support the knowledge society; alternative and community-based technologies; redefining the concept of knowledge to take into account local, indigenous, and diverse knowledge systems.

### **4.4.2 *Developing content***

Major themes would be development of the global information commons, preservation of language, fostering cultural diversity and development of local content.

Specific themes would include information as a public good, with due consideration for intellectual property as protection for authors; the role of the media; freedom of expression and of the media; public financing for developing non-commercial content; support for development of non-commercial and independent media; enabling people and women in particular to access and participate in the development of content that represents their own realities and diversities; prevention of content dumping.

### **4.4.3 *Peoples, communities and rights***

Major thematic subcategories here include: information and communication rights; the creation of electronic commons, free public spaces and technical resources that can be used to meet human needs; community control of ICT infrastructures; capacity building; and the multiplicity of dimensions of diversity.

Specific themes here would include: the empowerment of communities through ICTs; support for oral information and cultures; privacy; support for independent, community controlled media and other community-based and community-owned forms of communication; the needs of people with disabilities; needs of the elderly; support for cross-cultural communications; and geographic-specific themes.