Geneva, June 16th, 2003

Bertrand Ramcharan
Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations
Geneva, Switzerland

RE: Human Rights and the World Summit on the Information Society

Your Excellency Mr. Bertrand Ramcharan,

The undersigned civil society organizations strongly encourage your active participation in the preparatory committee and summit meeting of the World Summit on the Information Society, taking place in September and December 2003, respectively. Human rights are an essential requirement of the Information Society, as elaborated in the draft declaration of the WSIS (WSIS/PCIP/DT/1-E):

10. The essential requirements for the development of an equitable Information Society include: The respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms. Notably the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to hold opinions without interference and seek to, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers in accordance with article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to unhindered access by individuals to communication media and information sources…

As the United Nations highest human rights official, your good offices are needed to ensure that human rights language in the WSIS process is comprehensive, strong and consistent with resolutions and decisions adopted by the Commission on Human Rights and build upon human rights language developed through the various UN world summits and conferences.

Civil society organizations view ICTs as having both tremendous applications that enhance human rights, such as through the rapid dissemination of action alerts and instant access to human rights information, and disturbing capacities to greatly diminish human rights, such as by providing governments with means enabling intrusive surveillance and monitoring and therefore, repression.

Only through the active participation of governments, civil society, and international human rights institutions such as your Office can these ICTs be best harnessed to maximize the protection of human rights worldwide.

We hope the Office of the High Commissioner will become involved in this event and we look forward to our ongoing collaboration in ensuring that the World Summit on the Information Society has a strong human rights focus. In particular we are hoping that you personally will be able to attend the Third Prep Com, to take place in Geneva in September
15-27, 2003, and we look forward to meeting with you at that time. We also hope that the Office of the High Commissioner will be prominent in the deliberations of the Summit in December, and that we will harness the potential of information technology to serve the cause of human rights to the Summit in Tunisia and beyond.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Rik Panganiban, World Federalist Movement
Rikke Frank Jorgensen, Danish Institute for Human Rights, co-coordinator of the WSIS Human Rights Caucus
Meryem Marzouki, Imaginons un Réseau Internet Solidaire, co-coordinator of the WSIS Human Rights Caucus

Copies:
Mr. Adama Samassekou, President of the WSIS Preparatory Process
Mr. Pierre Gagné, Director of the Executive Secretariat

[List of organizations endorsing this letter:

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