



FIDH/HRIC Open Statement:

China Blocks Open Discussion at WSIS with Procedural Maneuvering

September 20, 2005

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organization, Human Rights in China (HRIC), denounce the decision of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), a process that claims to include the broadest possible participation, to block open discussion on supporting independent NGO voices. At the WSIS PrepCom-3 opening Plenary Meeting yesterday, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was able to block a vote on HRIC's accreditation with a procedural maneuver that revealed both the politicized nature of the process and China's adverse impact on the WSIS principles of building a "people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society."

The WSIS Executive Secretariat list of recommended entities for accreditation to the WSIS was introduced and approved by the PrepCom without any discussion. After questions and concerns raised by the U.S. and UK delegations regarding why HRIC was not on the list of recommended organizations, the Executive Secretariat responded that although HRIC had been fully transparent in the application process, its file was incomplete because it had not disclosed anonymous donors. HRIC had complied with all requests for supplemental information, including providing an independent auditor's letter confirming that no direct governmental contributions were received.

After the U.S. made a motion to accredit HRIC, the PRC moved to raise a procedural objection to any discussion concerning organizations not on the recommended list.

Following more than an hour of debate among country delegations, the PRC's motion was then brought to a roll-call vote: with 194 accredited countries, 122 were present at the opening Plenary Meeting in PrepCom-3, and of these countries, 35 abstained from voting, 35 voted against not allowing discussion, and 52 voted in favor of not allowing discussion. Despite the PRC's claims to be simply raising a procedural issue in the interest of facilitating moving on to "substantive" issues, its motives were exposed when it attacked HRIC during the debate by dismissing "so-called NGOs with dubious governmental links."

"On the occasion of the First phase of the World Summit on Information Society, States adopted a Declaration of Principles which recognized the right to freedom of expression contained in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as 'an essential foundation of the information society (paragraph 4),' including that '[t]he ability for all to access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge is essential in an inclusive information society (paragraph 24).' We can only deplore that governments have failed to apply these principles to the mere second phase of the Summit. As we can see, these principles ironically do not apply to all information—in particular not to contributions from Human Rights in China, the group China attempted to exclude," deplores Sidiki Kaba, president of the FIDH.

“China’s actions at the WSIS need to be viewed within the broader context of pervasive and systemic human rights violations in China, including censorship and information control, and ongoing detentions of journalists and internet activists, for example the sentencing of journalist Shi Tao to ten years for merely exercising his right to free expression and to criticize the government, as protected by China’s own constitution,” states Sharon Hom, HRIC’s executive director. “Unfortunately, the international community has witnessed another example of China’s efforts to repress free and open debate not only domestically, but also in the international arena.”

Despite a 16-year record of constructive participation in international processes, including WSIS Phase I, UN treaty bodies and the WTO, and the broad support of civil society organizations, HRIC’s accreditation process was held to a far higher degree of discriminatory scrutiny than that of other NGOs. The blocking of any substantive discussion of HRIC’s accreditation also sends a clear message that a single country can exert influence to control which voices will be recognized on key policy issues, undermining the WSIS principles of democracy, transparency and multi-stakeholder participation.

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About Human Rights in China

Human Rights in China (HRIC) is an international monitoring and advocacy non-governmental organization based in New York and Hong Kong. Founded in March 1989 by Chinese scientists and scholars, it conducts research, education and outreach programs to promote universally recognized human rights and advance the institutional protection of these rights in the People’s Republic of China.

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