

## **Statement from civil society organizations on Tunisia and WSIS**

The civil society organizations present in Geneva for PrepCom 3 of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) have learnt with stupor and indignation of the appointment by Tunisian President Ben Ali of General Habib Ammar as President of the preparatory committee of the second phase of the Summit to be held in Tunisia in 2005.

The signatory organizations are already preoccupied by the decision to hold the second phase of WSIS in a country known for its serious violations of human rights and the rule of law. They consider that naming this military man, a former Interior Ministry, who has been denounced by the World Organization Against Torture for his activities, presents a real risk of compromising the proceedings of this Summit. This appointment has already tarnished the image of the WSIS and risks undermining the legitimacy of its outcome.

The civil society organizations consider that the two principal objectives of the Summit, that is to say the struggle to overcome the digital divide and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the information and communication society, cannot be dissociated from each other.

Under point 11 of PrepCom3 agenda, we strongly urge that the Summit organizers, including governments, to join in the growing preoccupation of world opinion, so that the holding of the second phase of the Summit in Tunis is subordinated to concrete signs by Tunisia that it respects human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We specially request the following

- the freeing of journalists and others held in prison for their opinions in Tunisia
- the appointment of a personality who is not the object of opprobrium at the head of the organizing committee of the second phase of the Summit
- the commitment to allow all civil society representatives from Tunisia and abroad to participate freely in the work of the Summit

The signatory organizations will closely follow the responses of the international community to these preoccupations.

Statement proposed for signatures by the WSIS civil society Human Rights Caucus

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