

Consumers International

PROPOSAL FOR CONSUMER INTERNATIONAL'S PARTICIPATION IN THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS)

The World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS), to be held in Geneva in December 2003, will doubtlessly be a fundamental milestone that will make it possible to open up and channel discussions about the information society's benefits and future.

Globalization currently defines the world in which we live. It is expressed by a progressive influence of worldwide economic, social and cultural processes experienced on national and regional levels. The changes it causes are especially drastic in the realm of the communications and information revolution, which presents this era with fundamental qualitative transformations when compared to the way of life in the past. This worldwide scenario has generated huge leaps in planetary communications that are supported by new communications technologies, especially the Internet, which offers a variety of content regarding all realms of human life.

We live immersed in a society of information and knowledge. This scenario has also created a passionate challenge that consumers cannot ignore. However, this challenge is full of difficulties. New circumstances are evolving so fast that falling into the margin of progress is a very plausible risk.

It is necessary for us to interest citizens – especially from Asia, Africa and Latin America – governments and companies in this society of knowledge as soon as possible. We need to promote research for developing new information and communications technologies that are accessible to the majority. In order to do this, we must expand the use of Internet, facilitate fast, cheap and safe access to the network, and invest in educating potential users.

Democratization of information means bringing the digital era to every citizen, school and company, creating a digitally literate society, assuring that this process

of knowledge be socially integrating and trustworthy for consumers.

The world's population needs to avoid being marginalized by the information society so that it can receive all of the benefits that digital technologies and the Internet offer in the framework of sustainable growth, an increase in productivity and competitiveness, fair markets, creation of new jobs and further economic and social progress.

In this globalized world, with its open markets and instantaneous media-generated relationships, we are witness to a rapid growth in consumption. Public and private consumer spending was estimated at US \$25 billion in 1999, double the spending levels in 1975. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, per capita private consumer spending grew by 1.7% in 1996 and by 3.4% in 2000. Commerce is, in fact, the economic indicator that has grown most in recent decades, practically doubling world GDP growth rates. At the very end of the chain this market creates, there is always a person consuming goods and services. There couldn't be a more universal category than a consumer. From the moment we are born, we are consumers according to our possibilities, but as we grow our capacity to consume becomes highly unequal depending on our social status or the country where we live

Consumers have already reaped the benefits of using new communication and information technologies. They have increased access to information, which makes it easier to shop for more and better quality goods and services. However, Consumers International believes that the information society's real potential has not yet been developed, because in order for this to happen, there need to be worldwide agreements with concrete definitions and a future vision about how this development should come about.

Consumers International also believes that communication and information technologies are an indispensable tool for meeting the consumer movement's objectives, like eradicating poverty, achieving sustainable development and making access to education and information more democratic.

In recent years, Consumers International has actively worked on issues related to the information society. There has been a lot done on consumer access to communications and information, included especially in projects about public services. CI has also done research and studies about Internet shopping, on-line conflict resolution, and the privacy and credibility of Web sites.

Consumers International recognizes and identifies with the issues proposed for discussion at WSIS, especially those concerned with universal and fair access to the information society, fulfillment of the developing world's necessities, consumer protection, privacy and security, information society ethics, and many others.

The United Nations' request that a wide range of social spheres participate in the Summit is highly important, and Consumers International fully agrees that the

“information society has taken an active role in attracting attention about the social and cultural consequences of current trends and about the need to make strategic decision making more democratic at all levels. Because it is diverse and frequently takes a practical approach to different issues, civil society is a fundamental participant in the renewed international collaboration called for by the UN General Secretary.

Consumers International has high expectations for WSIS, especially considering the issues that are going to be covered and the context of discussions. In order for the consumer movement’s contribution to be effective at WSIS, we need be able to participate in the planned activities both regionally and globally, and we need to write a series of documents that will feed the debate in Geneva.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Prepare Consumers International’s contributions on a conceptual level to make our participation at WSIS and during preparatory meetings as active, effective and directed as possible.
- Assure that representatives of Consumers International can participate in the World Summit on the Information Society and in planned preparatory activities.
- Establish a mechanism to keep track of WSIS’s achievements and prepare for the second phase in Tunisia in 2005.

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Preparation of documents

We will hire a specialist to write a document that defines the world consumer movement’s position on issues to be discussed at WSIS.

The text will be published as a working paper.

Activity 2

Consumers International Seminar on the Information Society

We will organize a seminar on the WSIS and its importance for Information Society consumers so that we can define criteria, share experiences, establish a common standing and generate proposals that can be presented to the WSIS.

Representatives from CI’s regional offices in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and from its Economies in Transition office will participate

in the seminar. We will invite specialists and other representatives from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The two-day seminar will have a total of 12 participants.

Activity 3

Participation in regional preparatory meetings for WSIS

Consumers International needs to assure that delegations – made up of staff from regional offices and member-organization representatives – can participate in all of the summit's activities, including:

- a) The Regional Conference for Latin America

This preparatory conference will be held in the Dominican Republic in January 2003.

- b) The preparatory meetings (PrepCom) to be held in Geneva

Second PrepCom in Geneva, February 17 – 28, 2003

Third PrepCom in Geneva, September/October 2003

A CI delegation comprised of four (4) representatives from regional offices and four (4) consumer organization representatives will attend each PrepCom.

- a) The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) sessions

Participation of a ten-person CI delegation at the WSIS in Geneva on December 10-12, 2003

Activity 4

Follow-up of WSIS resolutions and preparation for Tunisia 2005

We will create a mechanism to follow up on resolutions passed at the WSIS until the second phase begins in Tunisia in 2005.

BUDGET

Item	Description		Total
Write Preparatory Document	1 specialist X 2 months X US\$ 2,000		4,000
Document Editing	Working paper, edited and printed		2,000
International Seminar	12 plane tickets X US\$ 900		10,800
	Per Diem X 12 X US\$ 95 X 3		3,420
	Operating expenses, materials, venue, infrastructure		2,000
Regional conference Latin America	3 plane tickets X US\$ 900		2,700
	Per Diem X 3 X US\$ 95 X 4		1,140
Second PrepCom	8 plane tickets X US\$ 900		7,200
	Per Diem X 8 X US\$95 X 12		9,120
Third PrepCom	8 plane tickets X US\$ 900		7,200
	Per Diem X 8 X US\$ 95 X 12		9,120
WSIS	10 plane tickets X US\$ 900		9,000
	Per Diem X 10 X US\$95 X 3		2,850
WSIS Follow-up			10,000
Total			80,550