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English only

NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee

Discussion Forum for Civil Society on the World Summit on the Information Society

From December 9th 2002 to January 15th 2003, UNESCO sponsored an on-line Discussion Forum for Civil Society about the World Summit on the Information Society. The purpose was to enable NGOs to offer their proposals for the Summit around a number of themes agreed upon through several preparatory meetings (27-28th November 2002). The following themes were retained: general discussion, access, development and empowerment, content issues, education-training-and research, rights, emerging technologies, civil society in the WSIS and beyond. There was broad participation from all the major regions of the world (see annex for list of participating NGOs). Contributions to the discussion can be consulted at <http://wsisforum.unesco.org>. The present document only reflects the concrete recommendations that emerged. These recommendations are presented with a view into their incorporation into the **final action plan** of the WSIS, as a contribution of NGOs recognized as being representative for societal and technical expertise in the field of information and communication technologies and as having broad field experience).

I/ FUNDAMENTAL LINES OF ACTION

- Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which contains principles that are endorsed by the international community, should now be implemented.
- The information society should deal with information, knowledge, data and news.
- Media using new communication technologies should be afforded the same status and rights as traditional print and broadcasting media.
- For the digital divide to be overcome and ICTs to become as universal as possible, illiteracy must be eradicated, electricity must become generally available and there must be widespread appropriate user-training.
- Governments should provide the widest possible access to officially held information, both off and on-line.
- The UN system should act to create a universal and regional clearinghouses to share and expand already existing knowledge resources (database of local expertise, research, websites, CD-ROM, brochures, etc.).

II/ ACCESS:

- -There should be no discrimination in providing access to information. Access should be free of charge whenever possible and as affordable as possible in other cases. Communication fees or charges for purposes of information gathering should be as low as possible and should not serve as a barrier to access.
- -Library and archive services as well as telecentres should be made as accessible as possible to remote and disabled populations. Measures should be taken to ensure and guarantee the preservation of archive integrity of all information regardless of medium, including the digital and cultural heritage.
- The networking of world library and archive resources should be a major priority. Libraries and archives should be legally empowered and should respect the privacy of their users.
- In recognition of the key role of libraries and archive institution in the information society, both training in library sciences, and the transfer of these skills should be given special attention.
- WSIS should set up a working group on archive integrity to include all stakeholders.

III/ DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT:

- All information society content providers should offer appropriate interfaces facilitating access and use by persons with disabilities.
- New and traditional (including WiFi where telephones are unavailable) communication technologies should be made available to remote communities in specially created public access facilities.

IV/ CONTENT:

- Stakeholders should support choices for open content initiatives, and widen scope for public domain knowledge and services.
- Guidelines on best practices that are commonly accepted by professional groups of stakeholders should be equally applicable both on-line and off-line.

V/ EDUCATION:

- Information literacy should be an integral part of school curricula and life-long education.
- Familiarization programs with ICTs should be made widely available to decision-makers so that they understand the opportunities that these represent for their constituencies.
- Programs must be established for training educators to include ICTs, multimedia and other new ways of communicating knowledge and culture, as well as ways to adapt these to local needs.
- ICTs should be used to strengthen the capacities for research and the exchanges between researchers.

VI/ RIGHTS:

- On-line workers should have the same contractual rights and protections as other workers.

- Media concentration (in all areas, including those in ICTs) should be subjected to anti-monopoly scrutiny and laws.
- No single model of dealing with the ethical problems of news media professionals on a national level should be imposed. Many approaches are possible, provided they respect freedom of expression and press freedom.
- Serious consideration should be given to modifying international copyright regimes to provide freer use for non-profit educational and archiving purposes. The “fair use” approach to copyright should be respected.

VII/ EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES:

- Insufficient bandwidth provision, which varies around the world, widens the digital divide. These bandwidth differences must be overcome so that all users of ICTs may have equal access to available information and knowledge. The current Japanese 12 Megabandwidth level, able to accommodate MPEG 7 for \$12 per month, should be retained as minimum level and maximum cost worldwide by 2005.
- WSIS should give active support to the deployment of IPV 6 (Internet Protocol Version 6).
- Legitimate governmental security concerns should not compromise individual rights to privacy and communications.
- Intergovernmental and governmental authorities should integrate emerging ICT convergences
- The UN system should establish an observatory for emerging communication and information technologies, to allow all stakeholders in the Information Society equal access to future available resources, to monitor change and avoid duplication.

VIII/ CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS ROLE IN WSIS:

In respect of the WSIS process, the NGOs request:

- that they be accorded equal voice in the deliberative processes, as provided for by the resolutions of the UN General Assembly ;
 - Many NGOs have requested a significant funding allocation to encourage Civil Society participation in and useful input to the WSIS process.
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