
Document WSIS/PC-3/CONTR/72-E
31 May 2003
Original: English

World Press Freedom Committee

Dear Madam/Sir

The following submission on an essential principle -- freedom of expression, access to information, maximum dissemination of information and the freedom of the news media -- is presented for incorporation in the broad over-arching statement of principle applying to all the outcomes and statements emanating from the WSIS and be reiterated in all relevant subsidiary documents.

This is presented by an accredited NGO, the WORLD PRESS FREEDOM COMMITTEE, by its Africa Representative Raymond Louw who is also acting in a private capacity. Raymond Louw attended the African Regional Preparatory meeting for the WSIS in Bamako, Mali, May 25-30 2002, on behalf of the WPFC.

We are willing to give any assistance that may be required in furthering the adoption of this submission by the WSIS.

The submission reads:

The heads of states and governments and the representatives of governments, inter-governmental organisations and all others associated with the WSIS and its activities

1) Recognise that in dealing with the important issues that are under discussion by this Summit and those that are to be discussed at succeeding meetings associated with the WSIS

2) Accept that the aims and objects of the WSIS cannot be addressed or achieved unless there is transparency and access to the information citizens require to make sound decisions; and, accordingly:

3) Stress the vital importance that full recognition be accorded to the free flow of information about the discussions and the decisions taken in relation to them; and accordingly adopt the following principles:

4) That Freedom of Expression is a crucial element of all the proposals, discussions, research and decision-taking by the Summit and elsewhere -- including by governments, communities, inter- governmental organisations and other institutions and that it should be regarded as a cornerstone of all WSIS activity;

5) That Freedom of Expression should not be restricted by political, social, religious or cultural constraints;

6) That in adopting the principle of Freedom of Expression there is full acceptance of the fundamental importance of the news media in meeting the public's right to know and a conviction that open public debate and the free flow of information are essential to any long- term solutions to the issues under discussion by the Summit and the problems arising from them;

7) That, recalling the recognition given by Kofi Annan, Secretary- General of the United Nations, Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Koichiro Matsuura, Director- General of UNESCO, and others to the importance of Press freedom and Freedom of Expression in dealing with world problems, it is accepted that any strategy to address the problems encapsulated in WSIS aims and activities must promote maximum respect for freedom of expression and of the news media and must not restrict their fundamental rights; and

8) That structures and facilities for the implementation of information society purposes created in accordance with the aims and objectives of the WSIS, will be used under the overriding principle providing for the maximum gathering and dissemination of information in furtherance of freedom of expression.

9) In adopting these principles, the following news media and freedom of expression principles are accepted:

A) That the news media has a right to report fully on issues in the interest of the public's right to know and to promote open, informed debate about public interest issues;

B) That all parties should respect the right of journalists to investigate and report freely and fully on public interest issues and to have maximum access through the facilities provided or promoted by the WSIS to gather and disseminate information;

C) That, while acknowledging that the issues mentioned in B) and elsewhere can be sensitive and embarrassing, these factors should not be used as an excuse to impose restrictions on the right to freedom of expression and of the news media, nor on freedom of information, and, specifically, the following rights:

i) To editorial independence;

ii) To protect confidential sources of information;

iii) To access information held by public bodies;

iv) To seek information from private bodies and institutions;

v) To publish freely issues that excite the public interest no matter how much controversy is caused;

vi) To freedom of movement; and

vii) To privacy of communications.

D) That news media outlets, journalists' and publishers' and broadcasters' associations, academic institutions and other civil society organisations should take measures to enhance the capacity of the news media to report professionally on public interest issues and to promote opportunities for discussion of ethical issues relating to such reporting; and

E) That states, governments, inter-governmental organisations and other institutions and instances that subscribe to the principles of the WSIS, their implementation and the maximum use of the facilities and services created under the mantle of the WSIS should take effective measures to ensure that their various governmental services, including defence, police and intelligence agencies and security establishments, understand and respect the rights of journalists to carry out their professional duties and their rights to freedom of movement and freedom of expression;

F) That these governments and institutions should devote effective resources and attention to prevent attacks on journalists, especially those engaged in investigative reporting assignments, and to bring to justice without delay those responsible; and

G) That all concerned take measures to promote the safety of journalists.