

# High-Level Policy Statements

## Policy Statements F

### **H.E. Mr Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Holy See (Vatican City State)**

Mr. Secretary General,

The Holy See is pleased to have this opportunity to address this High Level Segment of the WSIS Forum and continues to be convinced that humanity is 'entering a new era of enormous potential' (WSIS, Geneva Declaration of Principles, 67) for human growth through emerging technologies and stresses the importance of recognizing and celebrating the capacity of these technologies to facilitate human communication, to allow for the sharing of words and images almost simultaneously across enormous distances and with people who might previously have been isolated. *This in turns allows people to use the technologies to promote greater understanding and harmony among people, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all* (Pope Francis, 2014).



These technologies, however, will not automatically lead to a change for the better: there is a need for a determined commitment from individuals and institutions if this is to happen. Good communication is always a human rather than a technical achievement. Just because social communications increase the possibilities of interconnection and the dissemination of ideas, it does not follow that they promote freedom or internationalize development and democracy for all. To achieve goals of this kind, they need to focus on promoting the dignity of persons and peoples, they need to be clearly inspired by charity and placed at the service of truth, of the good, and of fraternity. The Holy See renews its commitment to work with all relevant stakeholders to build a people-centred Information Society (WSIS, Geneva Declaration of Principles, 20).

There is a role for Governments and International Organizations to play in regulating this environment, but there is an equally important moral or ethical obligation on all of us as individual agents to ensure that these environments are safe and humanly enriching (WSIS,

Geneva Declaration of Principles, 56 – 59). Commentators frequently speak of *user generated content* with reference to the social networks, but we must remember also that the *very culture of the social networks is user generated*. If the networks are to be spaces where good positive communications can help to promote individual and social well-being then the users, the people who make up the networks, need to be attentive to the type of content they are creating, promoting and sharing. The Holy See acknowledges the unfortunate reality that discrimination and violence are being promoted on-line and invites all to avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of human beings, that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable.

The Holy See urges all stakeholders to ensure that the benefits of the Information Society are accessible to all (WSIS, Geneva Declaration of Principles, 51). The more we grow in appreciation of the mutual understanding and solidarity that is achieved in authentic communication, the more we will desire that it is truly inclusive and that our conversations are accessible to all. This inclusiveness requires that we are attentive to ensure that the developing nations are not excluded from those digital networks which are promoting development and educational opportunities; in the developed world, we must also be careful that the increased digitalization of Governmental services does not serve to deny access to the elderly, the poor and the marginalized.

The Holy See wishes to reiterate the importance of dialogue (WSIS, Geneva Declaration of Principles, 52). If the digital networks are to achieve their potential in promoting human solidarity then we must foster the art of dialogue. If we are willing to listen to others, we will learn to see our world with different eyes and we will grow in appreciation of the richness of the human experience as revealed in other cultures and traditions. Our engagement with others will alert us to those basic desires to love and be loved, for protection and security, for meaning and purpose that are shared by all humans. Attentiveness to our human condition, and to the one world which we all share, alerts us to the truth that ultimately these desires can only be satisfied if we construct a society that is committed to a shared concern for the well-being of all rather than to an ethos of unbridled competition where the happiness of some can only be achieved at the expense of others. Many of the greatest threats to our future from climate change to food insecurity, and from war and terrorism to criminality, can only be addressed by dialogue and agreed forms of action. With a commitment to mutual understanding and dialogue, we will best realize the potential of the new technologies to promote a better future for all.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary General