Union Network International (UNI)

A Connected World

People first in the information society

Submission by Union Network International for the World Summit on the Information Society

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Introduction

Union Network International (UNI) warmly welcomes the decision to hold the World Summit on the Information Society, and looks forward to playing a full part in the discussions and debates in Geneva and Tunis.

The development of information and communication technologies represents a significant change in the way in which economies, and societies, operate.   UNI believes that the potential in the new technologies can be harnessed to improve the good of humanity. It is indeed possible to hope for a better and more prosperous future, enabled by the enormous potentially liberating opportunities of the new technologies.

However, this outcome is not guaranteed. There is no pre-ordained path towards the future. The information society could develop in different ways, some of which would be intensely antithetical to human hopes and aspirations. We argue for an information society based on social inclusivity, equality of opportunity, and cultural diversity, and we do not believe that the future can be left simply to market forces to shape. We look forward keenly to the opportunities the WSIS will bring to broaden the international debate about these issues.

We also believe that the question of development and poverty eradication should be at the heart of this debate. We agree with the UN Millennium Declaration that 'the central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalisation becomes a positive force for all the world's people'. This will not be possible unless the world's economic and social divides are bridged.

ICTs have an important potential role to play in development, not least in the continent of Africa which has found itself outside the mainstream of the world economy, and which has suffered the most from globalisation. Africa's voice must be heard in the WSIS deliberations. The Summit provides an opportunity to look in detail at the role of ICTs in assisting the world community realise the identified international development goals, including the reduction of poverty, the provision of primary education, the improvement of health care services and the tackling of gender inequalities. ICTs, potentially, can help in all these areas.

There has been much talk of the digital divide, but as yet insufficient action to combat it. There are practical ways in which current imbalances of access to technology can be addressed; what is needed is the will to do this.

The digital divide exists not only between countries and regions of the world , but also within countries. We look forward to the WSIS discussing ways to ensure that the opportunities of the information society are made available to all, to women as well as to men, to older people, to those with physical disabilities, and to those who in other ways are economically or socially marginalised.

UNI's interest in the issues under debate in the WSIS comes from its position and role:

- **As the international trade union federation (Global Union Federation) which represents fifteen million members in 800 affiliated unions, many of whom engage in their day-to-day lives with the increasing reality of the information society.**
UNI members write the software codes, design the web pages, staff the call centres, input the data and undertake all the myriad other jobs which, a few years ago, simply did not exist. UNI's members also experience the pains and problems which are accompanying the growth of the information society, when they suffer the effects of insecure (or no) employment, stressful working environments, inadequate training opportunities and the fear that technology will leave them work-less and redundant.

- **As an organisation which itself is a child of the information age.**

UNI is the result of a merger in 2000 of four union federations, a recognition of the growing convergence between the IT, telecom, media, graphical and entertainment sectors, and of the need for trade union structures to adapt to changing economic circumstances.

- **As an organisation which has dedicated itself to being an 'on-line international', using ICT as effectively as possible in its own work.**
UNI has pledged to bridge the digital divide among its own affiliates, so that all have access to email and the internet.

- **As an organisation with experience of tackling the issues raised by the use of ICTs at work, and by new forms of work**
For example, UNI has identified the need (through the 'Online rights at work Code of Practice') to address issues of email and internet access at work, privacy and electronic surveillance. UNI's sectoral bodies have signed framework agreement covering the implementation of teleworking. UNI's ICT Forum, now in its tenth year, offers a unique international platform for trade unionists within the ICT sectors to meet together with business people and experts to share experiences and concerns.

- **As a party to social partnership at international level with multinational telecom companies.**
UNI has negotiated a number of global framework agreements with telecoms and other multinationals. Disappointingly, however, this process has not developed with computing and information technology companies.

- **As an organisation which is exploring the potential of new forms of trade unionism, suitable for changing economic realities.**
For example, UNI warmly welcomes the development of the IT Professionals Associations within the IT sector in India, an initiative to which it is delighted to have been able to offer support.

This submission from UNI emerges out of our varied experiences in these areas. We put forward the following proposals as forming the framework for the principles on which the information society should be created:

- A human rights perspective, based on the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (including the right to privacy and the right not to suffer arbitrary interference in communication)
- An internationalist perspective and vision
- Support for measures which help close the world's economic divides and encourage development and poverty eradication, as identified for example in the UN Millennium Declaration and the International Development Goals
- Support for developments which strengthen democracy and democratic institutions
- Support for the principle of easy and affordable access to the technological tools of the information society, and to measures which tackle the digital divide
- Support for the principle of free access to public information, and of easy and affordable access to the widest possible range of other information
- Support for independent media and freedom of expression, including artistic expression
- Support for developments which improve the position of people at work, including the strengthening of workers' rights
- Support for cultural and linguistic diversity
- Opposition to undemocratic use of state power
- Opposition to racism and xenophobia, and to practices which oppress or degrade others
- Support for the *regulated* development of ICT-enabled business (e-business), with the aim of generating long-term employment and improved living standards
- A long-term approach to development based on the principles of sustainability.

Action point 1
Confronting the digital divide

The WSIS initiative will have failed to realise its potential if it does not adequately address the central issue of the digital divide.

Statistical indicators paint a stark picture of the current disparities internationally in terms of use of computing and telecommunications technologies. For example, the United States with less than 5% of the world's population has more than 25% of the world's internet users. 85% of e-commerce websites are based in the USA. By contrast, the ITU estimates that sub-Saharan Africa has less than one telephone line per 100 people; in some countries, local telephone calls can cost the equivalent of $8 an hour.

UNI's view is that the digital divide is one phenomenon of a broader 'development divide' between rich and poor nations. It calls on participants to focus the debates at the WSIS within the overall context of the international imperative to address economic development and poverty elimination.

There are good reasons to believe that ICTs can play a significant role in development. As the Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force) put it in their 2001 report, "Access to and effective use of the tools and networks of the new global economy, and the innovations they make possible, are critical to poverty reduction, increased social inclusion and the creation of a better life for all". More recently, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has stressed that ICTs open up new windows of opportunity for African countries to accelerate economic growth and development.

The route towards connectivity in developing countries is likely to be different from that in developed countries, and may be found in community-based and collective solutions rather than individual solutions. One example is the proliferation of privately owned internet cafes servicing communities: 300 in Lomé, 100 in Dar-es-Salaam, 50 in Dhaka and 25 in Kampala, according to a UNCD report in 2001. In Senegal, public telephone and cyber café services are being provided by over 10,000 small businesses. In Bangladesh, the Grameen Phone initiative (linked to the micro finance Grameen Bank) enables a villager, usually a woman, to find the capital to subscribe to a mobile phone; she then sells access to the phone to neighbours.

Gradually, too, steps are being taken at regional level to redress historic inequalities in telecom infrastructure. For example, the establishment of the West African marine fibre cable (WAMC) linking several west African states, Angola and South Africa should make it easier for inter-African data communication traffic to remain within the continent rather than being routed, as almost invariably at present, through servers in North America or Europe. Satellite communication offers another possibility for parts of the world without extensive landline networks to leapfrog straight to modern telecom networks.

However the digital divide is not restricted simply to questions of connectivity and access to technology. The technology is simply a means to an end, the increase in information and knowledge through the provision of content and applications. Content (on issues such as health, water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, soil fertility, market prices for crops) can be of immediate relevance to rural communities in developing countries.

It is heartening therefore to see, for example, that the Declaration of the WSIS African regional conference (held in Bamako, Mali, in May 2002) stressed the importance of giving high priority to the creation of local content. The Declaration echoes the language of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), where one of the ICT-linked objectives is to develop local content software, based especially on Africa's cultural legacy. (We return to the issue of content and diversity later in our submission).

Connectivity also offers the opportunity of new employment possibilities. UNCTAD, for example, has identified the growth of 'teleservicing' work (such as transcription services, data input, remote server maintenance, digitisation services and database creation) in some developing countries. UNI welcomes the potential of ICTs

to create employment. However it insists that this work meets minimum core labour standards, and that the right of association of workers is properly recognised. Electronic sweatshops are as unsatisfactory as traditional sweatshops.

The global development of the information society must be based on principles of sustainability. The 2002 Johannesburg world summit has reminded the world of the vital need to ensure that economic development is sustainable, defined as the requirement that the current generation meets its needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In this context, UNI supports those non-governmental and trade union organisations which have been campaigning for environmentally friendly and energy-saving IT equipment and for proper recycling and safe disposal of redundant IT material. UNI's view is that manufacturers should be obliged to take responsibility for recycling waste electronic technology.

Action point 2
Combating discrimination in the information society

Women will not have the chance to participate equally with men in the emerging new work opportunities of the information society if current gender inequalities are not recognised and measures taken to combat them.

The ICT industry can be extremely exclusive of women. In Europe, for example, only around 20% of employees are women. There is little gender divide at the level of basic IT training, but far more men than women are taking university-level ICT-related courses.

Why is this? One reason is that the ICT industry does not always project an image which is attractive to younger women. The prevailing long hours culture is an example. Pressure is often put on people either by management or by peers to work long hours in order to be seen to be productive and 'one of the team'. This work culture discriminates against people with family responsibilities, and hence particularly against women.

This can be a vicious circle, in that IT applications and solutions of interest to women are less likely to be developed. As a consequence, women are less likely to want to become technologically literate or to have the opportunity to take appropriate training.   Men's stronger economic power is also a factor in determining which ICT products and services are brought to market.

Women are, however, over-represented in some areas of ICT-enabled work, particularly in lower-status and lower-paid work such as keyboard inputting and call handling in customer service centres (call centres).

There is also age discrimination in the IT sector. It is surely not an acceptable way forward for experienced, capable workers in their forties or fifties to be told that they are too old for the new jobs. This is what happened in the IT industry in the early 1990s, and there is a danger that it is happening again. This is wasteful in both economic and human terms. The speed of technology-induced change means that much more attention needs to be given to ensuring that people have access to education and learning opportunities throughout their lives, not only when they are young.

The work of creating the information society will require the work of men and women, of all ages. As we start from a position where power and status is not equally shared, therefore proactive measures will be required to address these inequalities.

Action point 3
Forging successful social partnership in the ICT sectors

The development of the information society and the increasingly globalised nature of the world economy are interrelated trends. The growth in importance of the ICT sector has gone hand-in-hand with the emergence of a small number of powerful multinational corporations. It hardly needs to be mentioned that Microsoft, for example, currently has a dominant position globally in terms of software provision.

Globalisation of this kind raises concerns about accountability and control, particularly when multinational companies show little sense of corporate social responsibility or of social partnership. UNI therefore supports initiatives which encourage responsible business practices. One important benchmark is the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, agreed by government, employer and workers' representatives. In its recently revised form, the Declaration calls on multinationals, governments and social partners to follow the ILO's lead in promoting decent work by contributing to the realisation of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. It calls for endorsement of the ILO Conventions on child labour and the minimum working age, and sets out principles in four areas, in the fields of employment, training, conditions of work and life, and industrial relations.

Another valuable initiative is the OECD's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, adopted in 1976 and revised in 2000.

UNI believes that social objectives should be embedded in the way in which the information society is built, and that social partnership is an essential element of this process. UNI welcomes the global framework agreements which a number of multinational companies have signed with Global Union Federations, including for example the Telefónica/UNI Framework Agreement signed in 2000. UNI hopes to see a much closer integration between the international debate on corporate responsibility for multinational enterprises and that on the information society.

UNI also affirms that negotiation and agreement between the social partners is the way to adopt the new ways of working which ICTs make possible. Teleworking, for example, can bring benefits to both companies and individual workers, but can also have negative effects on individuals. The recent European Framework Agreement on telework (negotiated by employers' organisations and trade unions and agreed in 2002) and the sectoral framework agreements negotiated by UNI in the telecom and commerce sectors in Europe provide models of the way in which new ways of working can be introduced in a positive and controlled way.

Because of UNI's concerns that the information society will be overly controlled by powerful private commercial interests, UNI also supports initiatives which help in the development of open source software, as an alternative to proprietary software. It can be argued, for example, that the internet has benefited enormously from its origins as a US government-sponsored research initiative rather than a commercial venture, and from the fact that the protocols on which internet file transfer and communication are based are open protocols in the public domain.

The open source community, with its strong commitment to the principles of collaborative research and shared endeavour, is a good example of the positive role civil society can play in the development of the information society. UNI believes that more attention should be given to the future role of open source computing, particularly in the context of developing countries.

Action point 4
Providing lifelong learning for all

In a world where many children do not receive even the most rudimentary primary education it can seem a luxury to discuss further education and lifelong learning. The Millennium Development Goals include the objective of achieving universal primary education by the year 2015 yet unfortunately, on current trends, this target will be missed, and more than 100 million primary school age children will not have the opportunity to be in school.

The importance of having well-trained specialists with the skills needed has been demonstrated in India, where 60,000-70,000 engineering and computer science graduates have been entering the workforce each year recently. This has been a major factor behind the rapid growth of the Indian IT sector. In Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has as one of its actions the objective of establishing a network of training and research institutions to build high-level manpower.

The need for education and learning to be available to all *throughout* their lives also needs to be highlighted. It is not simply that the rapid speed of technological growth requires frequently updating of skills. It is that economic growth will increasingly come to depend, not as in the industrial age primarily on physical capital, but on human knowledge.

UNI believes that basic education is a universal right, and that this education should be publicly provided and not subject to commercial provision or sponsorship. Vocational training by contrast is an area which lends itself to consultation between the social partners. UNI has welcomed the opportunity to participate, in conjunction with employers' bodies, in several recent training initiatives, for example in relation to call centre skills development.

To ensure that the opportunities inherent in the information society can be enjoyed by all, strategic importance needs to be given to the issue of lifelong learning. There are opportunities for this provided in the technology itself, and more work needs to be undertaken in the field of computer-enabled learning (eLearning).

Action point 5
Defending individual privacy in the information society

An individual's right to privacy is enshrined in, among other places, Article 12 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The commercial exploitation of the information society threatens this privacy. As one writer has put it "travellers on the information superhighway may be monitored and followed every step of the way".

The quantity of data which can be stored and interpreted for commercial purposes is almost limitless. Digitisation makes the storage and analysis of information vastly cheaper and easier, and the collection of data is not limited to written sources, since voice, pictures, images and other records of everyday life may also be stored effortlessly in digital form.

Information on individuals, their actions and their behaviour, has already proved of great value for commercial marketing purposes. It also gives tremendous power to state bureaucracies and undemocratic regimes.

There is an urgent need at international level to develop minimum standards to control the holding and use of personal data in electronic form. One safeguard would be to ensure that personal information on the internet generated for one purpose is not permitted to be used for an unrelated purpose, or disclosed without the individual's informed consent. Individuals need to have a mechanism for reviewing information held about them, and correcting any inaccuracies.

The potential of email is being undermined by growing levels of spam, and by impersonation. These problems need addressing at international level.

UNI is also concerned at the new dangers of intrusion into individuals' privacy in the workplace, for example through electronic monitoring of work performance and electronic surveillance. Technology can be used to monitor every aspect of a worker's life: cameras can observe behaviour, smart ID badges can track an employee's movements, telephone management systems can analyse telephone usage, software can monitor emails received and sent and websites visited, whilst satellite-based global positioning systems will increasingly allow employers to monitor the movements of remote-based staff.   Psychological and personality tests of various kinds, which are increasingly electronically assessed, also raise issues of privacy and fairness.

In some circumstances, electronic technology can be beneficial to both workers and companies – for example, CCTV cameras can help protect staff working late at night or in vulnerable locations. UNI is concerned, however, at the unregulated way in which electronic surveillance is being introduced, often simply because of companies unthinkingly availing themselves of facilities automatically available in standard software packages.

UNI calls for a more profound international debate about the risk to individual privacy in the information society.

Action point 6
Ensuring public access to information

The internet's culture in its early formative period was based on the free exchange of information and ideas. The powerful philosophical impulse of an open and free global network, which emerged from out of the early academic and 'techie' use of the technology, still provides some balance to those organisations which are concerned to commercialise the internet. (Of course, there may well be communication costs incurred in accessing 'free' material, particularly in developing countries where telecom charges can impose significant barriers to access).

Nevertheless the paradigm of free access is an important one. A distinction should be made between public and private bodies. Public organisations, including international bodies and governments, should be under pressure to ensure that they make their published material freely available on the internet. This is a necessary prerequisite for healthy democratic life, nationally and internationally.

It is unrealistic to argue that private and commercial organisations should never charge for information. However as commercial exploitation of information becomes more widespread, urgent steps need to be taken to ensure that those without the resources to pay are not excluded from community life. UNI therefore would support discussions aimed at developing the on-line equivalent of public libraries. Libraries have played an important role throughout history in humanity's cultural and scientific development; the challenge now is to extend the idea from the physical to the digital world.

The idea of free exchange of ideas and information across international borders has proved a challenging and indeed frightening one for some governments, particularly those with poor democratic credentials. In some countries, censorship of material available on the internet has been imposed as a means of defending a state's power and hegemony. UNI opposes this, as it does other undemocratic abuses of state power.

However this does not mean that the tools of the information and communications revolution should be available to be used to disseminate offensive material, such as racist ideology. It is appropriate for the international community to develop strategies, for example, to guard against the use of the internet to communicate views which encourage intolerance or discrimination, or which are degrading to individuals or peoples.

Action point 7
A universal service commitment to broadband connectivity

UNI maintains that a democratic model for the information society requires that all have access to communication networks. This requires a universal service commitment to affordable *broadband* connectivity and access.

Broadband has the potential to stimulate economies and create employment: for example, one recent report talks of the potential to create 1.2m new jobs through full broadband deployment. Widespread broadband deployment would create many social benefits, including opportunities for telemedicine, economic development, distance learning, public safety and services for the disabled.

However, broadband is an issue which cannot be left to the markets alone to deliver. Some level of political intervention and public policy initiative is the only realistic way of achieving universal broadband access. Regulators will need to intervene to provide the appropriate frameworks and incentives to entice established companies to upgrade existing networks, as well as where possible to encourage new competitors to enter this market.

UNI calls on governments to
- Build partnership projects to roll out broadband to rural and remote communities and targeted urban areas
- Ensure that regulation and public policy leads to the goal of widespread provision of affordable access to broadband
- Ensure sufficient regulatory and commercial incentives are in place to speed up broadband provision
- Ensure that the actions of regulators provide a level playing field to all broadband service providers
- Bring home to the public, through advertising, education and awareness programmes, the wide range of benefits to be delivered by broadband.
- Pump-prime research and development into possible new technologies, such as satellite and wireless broadband, particularly to rural/ remote areas
- Work with companies to support pilot, demonstration and showcase projects
- Use their significant purchasing power to promote broadband, for example in schools, colleges, libraries, hospitals and job centres.

Action point 8
Putting in place adequate regulatory structures for the information society

Information flows effortlessly across state boundaries. We can expect the information society to reinforce current moves towards globalisation. There is a necessity, therefore, to put in place robust and accountable international regulatory structures. We have already seen the speed at which the internet has, in a few short years, developed and have also seen how this has thrown up many legal, technical and regulatory issues.

We note the work undertaken by several international bodies, including for example the ITU, OECD, WTO, WIPO and the UN Commission of International Trade Law, in trying to address some of the issues raised. We should also acknowledge the significant contribution made by civil society groups, for example in relation to issues of access, democratic empowerment and civil liberties as they affect the internet. Self-policing schemes, such as internet watch hotlines which can be used when criminal material is identified, have been established in several countries.

We do not expect, and would not necessarily welcome, the establishment of a single international regulatory body able to oversee every aspect of the developing information society. We wish to make the following particular comments, however:

- The growth of e-commerce, particularly across national boundaries, threatens the ability of governments to levy taxes and duties on sales. We note, for instance, that the federal US government has for several years operated a tax moratorium of e-commerce.
UNI in general believes that e-commerce transactions should be taxed in the same way as conventional commerce transactions. The role which OECD is playing in coordinating international work on e-commerce taxation is a useful one. However, it is important to take note of the interests of developing as well as developed countries. For example, developing countries rely proportionately more on import duties, which are potentially threatened by the growth of digitised products and services.

- Crime is also increasingly a global phenomenon, and cyber crime is, unfortunately, already a major feature of the information society. UNI calls for the establishment of a global body to combat this; one useful initiative is the European Union's Cyber Security Task Force (due to be operational from mid 2003), which could be extended to become a global body.

Action point 9
Defending cultural diversity and creators' rights

The challenge is to build an information society where human cultural and linguistic diversity is celebrated and given opportunity to develop.

At present, one language – English – dominates in much electronic communication. We are also seeing the growth of large multinational media conglomerates (the so-called 'content providers' of the information age) which already have tremendous power to control TV and newspaper content in individual countries.

A firm commitment needs to be made to the principle of putting cultural diversity at the heart of the information society. This should include, among other things, taking appropriate measures to protect existing public service and not-for-profit broadcasting and media and to defend diversity in media ownership. It is likely to mean reinforcing support for the world's languages, including lesser-spoken languages. (There are opportunities provided by the technology: attempts to support some endangered languages are already being made via internet pages, for example. The WSIS African regional conference made practical proposals for promoting African languages via the internet).

Before the digital age, in almost all countries of the world, in even the minority where commercial broadcasting has been the principle means of structure of radio and television, public broadcasting has played an overwhelmingly important role as a means of assuring pluralism in dissemination of information, preparation of citizens for democratic involvement, preserving and disseminating culture, particularly of high quality, and bringing entertainment to the masses. The argument has been made that this remit is now out of date due to the multiplicity of types of media now available. In fact, there is nothing inherent in digitalisation and convergence to predetermine the abolishment of public service broadcasting, nor to lessen the need for its existence. Indeed, the uncertainty of media outlets during the last two years of economic crisis suggests that the stability of public service broadcasting may be even more needed in the unpredictable information society than ever before. What is needed is further financial support through whatever means are traditionally used in each state to sustain public broadcasting to assure that its services are extended many new areas made possible by new technologies.

As the Council of Europe has declared, 'Public service broadcasting should not only survive in the digital era, but should take the lead in exploring the new possibilities the information society offers to all media. Public service broadcasting companies should be closely involved in creating a new audio-visual communication culture in which traditional broadcast products converge with new media and multimedia products.

Beyond broadcasting, diversity of production of all audiovisual means must be encouraged, not overwhelmed by the new technical possibilities. It is now becoming more and more reasonable to demand that every national and people have the right to tell their own story and create and sing their own songs. Leaving this simply to the market in most cases will no more satisfactorily assure this than leaving all broadcasting to commercial interests. National policy will be necessary to assure such diversity; the technical possibilities that it could happen are not enough.

There is a broader risk of privatisation of the heritage of human cultural effort, if multinationals are able to acquire exclusive digital rights to such things as art gallery or museum collections or music works. Already large corporations in the publishing, media and entertainment industry are attempting to acquire comprehensive rights to the electronic publishing and dissemination of digitised 'content'. Photographical archives and digital rights to art collections are being snapped up.

The richness and variety of human cultural life, particularly those of native peoples and of developing countries, is potentially at risk from this development. The right of access and control of communities to their own cultural heritage could potentially be lost, if intellectual property rights do not adequately take into account

the shared nature of this heritage. As the WSIS African regional conference pointed out, moves to transfer information and knowledge into the private domain through IPR regimes could lock the continent out from its own information.

The rush for digital rights by powerful corporations, justified as the effort to counteract all forms of piracy certainly is, must not be allowed to erode the intellectual property rights of individual creators. Indeed, new technology can assure even fairer treatment of creators than past regimes have. Further international instruments regarding copyright and performers' rights are need to assure equitable returns to all creators, such as writers, directors, visual artists, and performers, whose livelihoods may depend on this. Such protections also are necessary for the larger social purposes of encouraging cultural creativity and assuring its diversity.

The goals of fullest access to information and the broadest expression of the diverse cultures of the world, the possibilities for both of which are greatly enhanced by the approach of the information society, cannot be fulfilled without freedom of opinion and expression. These human values, posited by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are necessary for the pursuit of happiness and self-realisation of all peoples, whether creators or consumers of works. Not only must means be found to assure traditional freedom of the press in the new circumstances but the fullest liberty of artistic expression, as in the digital age even more than before the medium can become the (artistic as well as intellectual) message, must also find a place, without being forced on anyone. UNI supports the position of its media, entertainment and arts sector that freedom of expression, particularly in the digital age, must have no limitations beyond those of protection of minors and the necessary regulation to assure intellectual property rights.

Action point 10
Making work safe and healthy in the knowledge society

Industrial accidents and diseases have, regrettably, been a part of work life for many people, particularly in developing countries but also in developed industrial economies as well. The development of the information society should be taken as an opportunity to create safer work processes and safer workplaces.

This will not be automatic. Whilst work in the information society can seem 'clean' when compared with working conditions of the industrial age, we can already see some worrying trends.

For example, the introduction of computers has led to a considerable growth in keyboard-induced muscular-skeletal disorders (including carpal tunnel syndrome, and repetitive strain injuries). This is a serious health problem for many who use keyboards for routine inputting purposes, and (whilst it is a problem world-wide) it has particularly affected women workers engaged in data inputting work and other similar work in developing countries. Automatic electronic monitoring of work undertaken (for example, by recording key depressions) aggravates the pressures under which computer operators work. Many of the problems associated with muscular-skeletal disorders could be alleviated if workers were entitled and able to take proper regular screen breaks.

The use of ICTs is also increasingly becoming associated with higher levels of psychological stress. This is wrongly sometimes seen as an issue related to an individual's psychological make-up; in fact the strain of working at high-pressure, particularly where the rhythm of work is dictated by the technology and is outside the individual's control, is an issue which needs to be dealt with on a collective basis.

The blurring of work and home time, as more flexible patterns of working are introduced, contributes to this trend. Some new forms of work organisation which are enabled by ICTs, including home-based teleworking, can make it harder to impose the necessary boundaries between work life and private social life. However, as we have seen, these new ways of working can be introduced in ways which are helpful to all, and which encourage a healthy work/life balance.

The aim must be to ensure that technology is harnessed to human needs, not allowed to control the way in which human beings work.

Action point 11
Ensuring on-line rights in the workplace

UNI has drawn attention (for example, in the Online Rights for Online Workers campaign, launched in 1998) to the way in which electronic communications and information media are used in the workplace.

UNI's On-line Rights at Work Code of Practice has been drawn up to establish an internationally recognised yardstick of what constitutes good practice. The Code is based on union concerns that some employers are preventing workers' representative organisations from being able to use facilities such as email and corporate intranets for industrial relations purposes. The Code also recognises that employers in turn have natural concerns that employees may take personal advantage of these facilities to the detriment of their work.

The Code has four sections. The first lays down that workers' organisations such as trade unions and works councils have the right to access and use the electronic facilities of an enterprise as part of their work, and that employees have the right to use these electronic facilities to communicate with their representatives. The Code effectively extends into the electronic age the sort of facilities for workers' representatives which were the subject of ILO Convention 135 and Recommendation 143. It recognises that in the electronic workplace the old ways in which unions and works councils traditionally communicated with members may no longer be the most appropriate.

The second section permits employees to use enterprise electronic facilities for non-business purposes, with the proviso that such use is not detrimental to their job responsibilities.

The third covers monitoring and surveillance of electronic communications, which is permitted only by collective agreement, if the employer is legally obliged to do so, or where there is reasonable reason to believe that an employee has committed a criminal or serious disciplinary offence. Clandestine monitoring is prohibited. This section is based on international human rights documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and on the 1996 advisory ILO code of practice on the protection of workers' personal data.

The fourth section states that the right of employees to use electronic facilities is subject to a number of conditions. Communications must be lawful and must not be used for sexually harassing colleagues or spreading offensive comments for example based on an individual's race, gender, age, sexuality, disability or appearance. The employer can require a disclaimer to be added, making it clear that employees' views are those of the author alone.

UNI believes that the Code is a step towards ensuring the basic rights of employees working in today's and tomorrow's information society. It welcomes the use of the Code, and of other similar Guidelines of good practice, in agreements between companies and workers' representatives in a number of countries.