World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)

WFUNA TASK FORCE ON WSIS

Contribution to the WSIS Draft Declaration of Principles and Draft Action Plan

Introduction

At the initiative of the United Nations Association of Denmark, a WFUNA Task Force on WSIS has been established to promote awareness of and support for the World Summit on Information Society among civil society, particularly in developing countries. United Nations Associations from Africa (Mozambique and Uganda), Asia (China and Pakistan) and Latin America (Ecuador, Dominican Republic and Venezuela) and Europe (Denmark) are on the Task Force, which is actively supported by the WFUNA Secretariat. The World Federalist Movement (WFM) is an active participant.

The comments submitted in this paper are intended as a first contribution to the debate on the WSIS Draft Declaration of Principles and Draft Action Plan. A Policy Paper, which will gather positions and evaluations from civil society in the above developing countries as well as the considered reflections of United Nations Associations around the world will be produced and published in relation to the WSIS. Through this extensive consultative process, the WFUNA Task Force on WSIS will help to mobilize global civil society engagement with the issues on the WSIS agenda and help facilitate a strong civil society presence in the WSIS preparatory processes and conferences.

The key issues of the WFUNA Task Force on WSIS are poverty eradication, rural access to ICTs, integration of ICT usage into the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals and the Right to Development, and gender equality in the Information Society.

General Comments

1. For the developing countries, the most important issue is poverty eradication. If people do not have access to proper infrastructure and cannot afford education, it is impossible for them to have access to information, let alone build an inclusive information society. Therefore, solidarity and cooperation between countries should be promoted and the developed countries should keep their commitment and take more responsibility to help the developing countries to achieve common prosperity, which is a prerequisite for an equitable development of the Information Society. Strong civil society networks are important tools in achieving the goal of an inclusive Information Society, and the WFUNA Task Force on WSIS can be a strong contributor to this end.

2. For the developing countries, affordable ICT infrastructure is essential for people to obtain access to information. In this regard, it should be noted that traditional ICTs, such as radio and television, are widely used in most developing countries, primarily because of lower costs and higher ability to reach illiterates. The price of traditional ICTs should be reduced and the transfer of technology

should be encouraged so that the developing world can obtain adequate information before they can reach the same level as the developed world regarding obtaining information through ICTs.

3. Traditional media should be involved in providing worldwide computer training programmes via television and radio to assist people from the developing countries in obtaining free education on computer science.

4. There is a strong need for capacity building on ICT technologies, not only in terms of personnel but also regarding upgrading equipment wherever necessary.

5. In relation to cyber-security (Draft Declaration of Principles, Section I, item C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs), it is essential to secure respect for the privacy and freedom of expression of the individual.

In the comments listed below text written in italics either replaces or adds to the original text in the Draft Declaration of Principles and Draft Action Plan.

Comments on Draft Declaration of principles

Section I B:

9. The Information Society is *based on highly-developed ICT networks,* equitable and ubiquitous access to information, appropriate content in accessible formats and effective communication so that *all people may be able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, particularly relating to matters of peace, human security, human rights, poverty eradication and sustainable development.*

11. *Efforts to create* the Information Society *should be integrated into all policies and projects focused on* the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals of combating poverty and hunger, eliminating illiteracy, reducing infant mortality, improving the status of women, improving maternal health, combating disease and promoting environmental sustainability *and most particularly the development of a global partnership to develop further an open trading and financial system, which addresses the special needs of least developed countries, deals comprehensively with developing countries' debt, develops decent and productive work for youth and provides access to affordable and essential drugs in developing countries.*

Section I C:

18. **Building the infrastructure:** A well-developed and easily-accessed and affordable information and communication network infrastructure is essential for the social and economic progress of countries, and the well-being of all citizens and communities. The improvement of connectivity *and the upgrading of ICT equipment are* of special importance in this respect.

19. **Community access points:** Public access from community centres such as post offices, libraries, and schools, provides an effective means for promoting universal access in particular in rural and remote areas and poor urban areas. *Therefore, innovative alternatives for enhancing public access in developing countries, such as subsidies and reduction of infrastructure costs, should be developed.*

35. **Secure and reliable infrastructure:** To realise the full benefits of ICTs, networks and information systems must be sufficiently robust to prevent, detect and to respond appropriately to security incidents. However, effective security of information systems is not merely a matter of government and law enforcement practices, nor of technology. A global culture of cyber-security needs to be developed*, and legislation on information security must be developed, both on national and international level. National legislation must cover issues of internal responsibility and liability, while international legislation should deal with inter-state aspects of jurisdiction, ownership, responsibility and liability.*

Section II: Observers' contributions to the Declaration of Principles

[7] The global Information Society represents the social and human construction, which is progressively built by all the vital forces of the world since they have started few decades ago. Looking at the fantastic, quick and continuous progresses made by the ICT industry and understanding the enormous possibilities that these progresses would allow in terms of networking infrastructures and services, it is necessary to consider and deal with ICTs not only as a particular economic activity among others but mainly as an economic*,*

cultural and technological platform to be used for all human activities, involving stakeholders as well as individuals.

[12 C] The traditional media of radio and television will long remain the major providers of information to the large majority of the world's population, particularly in the developing world. As such, they must be developed and exploited to the full as basic foundations of the information society and as providers of content to newer media made possible by ICTs.
(*Comment: This point is of key importance to the developing countries and must be emphasised strongly*).

[14] The Information Society is one where *any* citizen has the opportunity not only to access information but also to produce it and exercise their creativity.

Comments on Draft Action Plan

Section I A

3. **Universal access**: In order to achieve affordable and universal access in basic services it is essential:

- To utilize existing and new technologies to provide connectivity to all. *It should be noted that research into new ICT technologies should give priority to overcoming the disadvantages of illiterate people in developing countries*

- To develop connectivity for institutions accessible to the public such as schools, libraries, post offices, etc. *Comment: The Draft Declaration and Draft Plan of Action for the WSIS, as well as the PrepCom2 documents all propose using "post offices, libraries and schools" as public Internet access sites. This may not be a realistic solution in developing countries, since these facilities may not have the space, budget or other characteristics necessary to deal with this addition to their duties. In many places, these facilities may not even exist, may not exist in sufficient number, or if they do, they may already be taxed well beyond their capacities. Other solutions may need to be provided.*

- To study and promote relevant solutions adapted to the environment for ICTs in remote and rural areas.

- To establish multi-purpose community access points to ensure inclusive access to information and social services, particularly in rural areas.

- To evolve the concept of universal access/service to reflect advances and opportunities offered by technology, existing infrastructures, market development and changes in user demand.

5. **Low cost equipment**: The creation*, provision and maintenance* of low-cost access equipment shall be an integral part of the agenda for reducing the digital divide *and shall preferably target rural areas of the developing countries*.

19. **ICT manufacturing capabilities**: It is essential for governments to encourage technology transfer and investment, including venture capital, in the creation of national and regional ICT production facilities:

- Priority shall be placed on strengthening local micro-enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through their integration into the digital economy. Partnership mechanisms and business models should be developed for fostering clustering and partnership between SMEs in developing countries and industrialized countries.

- Public policies must foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

- The development of technology-based firms should be encouraged through venture capital funds, technology parks and business incubators, franchising IT clubs, together with the participation of academic institutions and research networks.

- Joint stakeholder efforts to address local obstacles and seek sustainable solutions for infrastructure in underprivileged areas should be encouraged.

- Governments should implement targeted monetary and fiscal policies to support the development of SMEs in the ICT sector (for instance, by relaxing duties and import taxes, and by initiating investment funds).

- *If a country's current national policies do not include support of investment by the private sector and a clear guarantee of private property rights, it will be difficult to stimulate private investment in new technologies. If currency exchange controls are in effect or in danger of implementation, foreign investors will also be wary. These situations must be dealt with if The Information Society is to have any significant degree of success.*

21. **ICTs in education:** The use of ICTs could contribute to more efficiency and better quality in education services. They should also contribute to reaching broad target groups:

- Information regarding the potential of new technologies in education should be disseminated through exchange of information on best practices, awareness campaigns, pilot projects, demonstrations and public discussions.

- ICTs should be incorporated in school curricula.

- ICTs should be used to train trainers and to ensure better delivery of education at all levels, including outside the educational structure, at the workplace and in the home.

- Teacher's skills and curriculum resources need increased support so that teachers can act as a gateway to the Information Society.

- There should be a large-scale integration of ICTs in primary education to generate a dynamic process towards e-literacy.

- *Literacy in its basic form is a requirement for using ICTs to enhance education, wherefore focus must also be on achieving the Millennium Development Goal of providing primary schooling for all girls and boys.*

- The capacity of developing and least developed countries to apply ICTs effectively in education must be enhanced through regional and international cooperation.

25. **Information Security**: Effective information security could be guaranteed not only by technology, but also by education and training, policy and law, and international cooperation. The United Nations should be supported in its efforts aimed at:

- Assessing the information security situation, including harmful interference or abuse using information and communication systems and information resources.

- Developing methods for protection and creating a rapid reaction organization to deal with security violations, as well as exchanging information and technology to combat violations.

- Studying the long-term possibility of creating an international convention on the security of information and communication networks.

- *Securing privacy and freedom of expression of the individual in the Information Society.*

Recognizing the principle of fair, equitable and appropriate access to ICTs for all countries, special attention should be paid to the fact that ICTs can potentially be used for purposes that are inconsistent with the objectives of maintaining international stability and security, and may adversely affect the integrity of the infrastructure within States, to the detriment of their security in both civil and military fields. *Simultaneously, it is vital that civil liberties and rights are protected and respected in the Information Society.*

Section I B:

45. Examples of possible concrete and comprehensive actions could include:
a) **Benchmarks:** The following could serve as benchmarks for actions to be taken:
- all villages to be connected by 2010, with a community access point by 2015;
- all universities to be connected by 2005, all secondary schools by 2010 and all primary schools by 2015;
- all hospitals to be connected by 2005 and health centres by 2010;
- 90 per cent of the world's population to be within wireless coverage by 2010 and 100 per cent by 2015;
- all central governments departments to have a website and email address by 2005 and all local governments departments by 2010.

Comment: These benchmarks seem unrealistic when reviewing general development of developing countries and ought to be re-evaluated.

Section I D:

54: **International cooperation**. Close international cooperation among national authorities, stakeholders and international organizations in all aspects of the Information Society is more vital today than ever:
- To this end, advantage shall be taken of the opportunities offered by regional financial institutions and the UN Regional Commissions.
- Encouraging entrepreneurship is an important goal. For this, it is necessary to establish certain basic structures, e.g. conducive regulatory frameworks and access to market information for businesses.
- Encouraging cyber-volunteer programmes, notably in relation to NGOs, activities regarding basic ICT training to marginalized groups, or in relation to specific ICT applications.
- Fostering a cumulative knowledge process by systematic networking between grassroots initiatives, by creation of websites, by facilitating exchange of information and experience, and through dissemination of good practices.

Comment: Global networks and organisations, such as World Federation of UN Associations and its national members, could prove useful in this endeavour.

Section II: Observers' contributions to the Draft Action Plan

Section II A:

[3] Universal access: In order to achieve affordable and universal access to the Information Society, including the traditional media, in basic services, the following are essential:

- Designing national network infrastructure;

- Developing infrastructure for radio and television coverage

- Adoption of a combination of infrastructure technologies for building IP-Public Data Networks, and Intelligent Networks;

- Mobilization of renewable and decentralized energy sources as a pre requisite for universal access to network infrastructures. Particular attention must be given to rural and isolated communities*; however renewable and decentralized energy sources often require costly technology and specific conditions for development.*

- Development of technology systems that are appropriate to local environments to effectively bridge the digital divide, for example community radio, local newsletters, and other forms of community and non-profit media shall be privileged.

- Support and encourage research programmes to design, develop and adapt ICT infrastructure, tools and application that are responsive to the needs of the poor, especially non-literate women.

For further information please contact:

UNA- Denmark
Midtermolen 3, st.th. - 2100 København Ø –
Phone 35 46 73 73 fax 35 46 73 50 –
email: fnforbundet@una.dk

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