

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility's Comments on the 21 March 2003 Draft Declaration of Principles and Draft Plan of Action to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

This document contains the comments of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) in reference to:

- Document WSIS/PCIP/DT/1-E (21 March 2003) Draft declaration of Principles Based on discussions in the Working Group of Sub-Committee 2 (DT-2 revised)
- Document WSIS/PCIP/DT/1-E (21 March 2003) Draft action plan Based on discussions in the Working Group of Sub-Committee 2 (WSIS/PC-2/DT-3 revised)

I. Comments on the Draft Declaration of Principles

1. **In reference to Paragraph 9 of the Draft Declaration of Principles:** CPSR believes that the notion that the Information Society is necessarily a higher form of social organization should be constantly challenged. This kind of statement completely masks the need to challenge the appropriateness of each and every ICT or complex system as they are considered or introduced into any given context. We must not simply assume that the use of ICTs constitutes a higher or better way. In fact, the concept of "appropriate use" of ICTs should be made explicit in the text.
2. **In reference to Paragraph 10 of the Draft Declaration of Principles:** CPSR has two concerns about this paragraph. First, it is not sufficient to assert that "the essential requirements for the development of an equitable Information Society" should be "in accordance" with Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Instead, the document should declare once and for all that Article 19 must be enforced. In addition, the principles of a better balanced flow of information, free circulation of ideas, press freedom, participation in the communication process, and knowledge sharing will become truly meaningful only when they are viewed as being supported by a consistent articulation of rights, not just Article 19. To this end, the document should declare that the following rights be enforced in concert in order that Paragraph 10 be made more meaningful:

Article 12 -- Privacy;

Article 18 -- Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion;

Article 19 -- Freedom of expression and the right to seek, receive, and impart

information through any media;
 Article 20 -- Freedom of peaceful assembly;
 Article 26 -- The right to education; and,
 Article 27 -- The right to participate in the cultural life of the community as well as intellectual property rights.

Second, the current text does not acknowledge the universally recognized reality that there is a great diversity of opinion in the international community about the optimal economic organization of the information society. To acknowledge this reality, we suggest the addition of a provision along the following lines:

Every nation and territory has the right to decide how to balance commercial objectives with other legitimate social interests in accordance with its local conditions.

3. **In reference to Section 4 of the Draft Declaration of Principles -- Capacity Building:** CPSR believes that this section must recognize that the characteristics and needs of communities are significantly different from those of businesses and technical organizations and, thus, require different approaches to design, development, deployment, and operation of ICTs. In this light, the special discipline of developing ICTs for communities -- community informatics -- must be more fully developed and nurtured if the information society is to contribute in a meaningful way to the Millennium goals.
4. **In reference to Section 9 of the Draft Declaration of Principles -- Ethical dimensions of the Information Society:** CPSR believes that this section must also declare principles to the following effect:

The public must have access to scientific information and expert judgment on ethical, social, and political that arise in the use of ICTs. Toward this end, computer and information science professionals must be encouraged to take a pro-active public role in both promoting the socially beneficial uses of ICTs and discouraging harmful ones.

II. Comments on the Draft Action Plan

5. **In reference to section 4 of the Draft Action Plan -- Capacity building: human resources development, education, and training:** CPSR believes that corresponding to Section 4 of the Draft Declaration of Principles (Capacity Building), community informatics -- the discipline of developing ICTs for communities -- must be more fully developed and nurtured if the information society is to contribute to the Millennium goals. The Action Plan must, therefore, call for the following:

a) SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY INFORMATICS: Research geared toward evolving community informatics must be supported. This would include the development of a research agenda among practitioners, scholars, and communities; the cataloging of community informatics projects and identification of both factors for failure and success; and support for research projects and systems trials.

b) SUPPORT FOR AN INTERNATIONAL FORUM IN COMMUNITY INFORMATICS: An ongoing, international forum or conference in community informatics is required.

This would create a center of focus and a forum in which researchers, practitioners, and communities can exchange results and maintain a coherent, field-wide research agenda, as is done in other fields.

c) EVOLVING SOFTWARE ENGINEERING STANDARDS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY INFORMATICS: International Organization for Standardization/International Electrotechnical Commission (ISO/IEC) and other relevant bodies should be encouraged to develop adaptations of existing systems analysis and software engineering standards, such the ISO/IEC 12207 life cycle standard, tailored to the unique needs of developing ICT-based solutions for communities.

Such standards should also recognize that the design of the information society must be a democratic and democratizing process. This requires a participatory, user-centered approach to designing ICTs in any community or setting in the information society.

d) ESTABLISH GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS THAT SUPPORT COMMUNITY INFORMATICS: WSIS and similar processes must establish global information society mechanisms of governance that empower citizens to apply and manage community informatics processes in meaningful ways. This would include the creation of intellectual property mechanisms that protect and encourage the use of open source technologies and development processes. In addition, it would provide mechanisms that ensure that public interests are taken into account when community informatics processes involve the private sector.

CPSR believes that the above action items should also be articulated accordingly in section B. (Objectives) of the Action Plan in paragraph 45 (Examples of possible concrete and comprehensive actions could include).

6. **In reference to paragraph 45 of the Draft Action Plan -- (Examples of possible concrete and comprehensive actions could include):** CPSR believes that the Action Plan should call for a special rapporteur who would be tasked with ensuring that the public has access to the latest scientific information and expert judgment on ethical, social, and political that arise in the use of ICTs. They would also work to ensure that the computer and information science professions take pro-active public roles in both promoting the socially beneficial uses of ICTs and discouraging harmful ones.
7. **In reference to Section 6 of the Draft Action Plan – Enabling Environment:** In paragraph 29 on Market environment, CPSR suggests the addition of a parallel provision on the international context:

International trade agreements can be a vitally important tool for the promotion of market-led economic development. However, they should recognize the needs of developing and transitional countries for special and differential treatment, as well as for adequate technical assistance with their implementation.

8. **In reference to paragraph 45 of the Draft Action Plan -- (Examples of possible concrete and comprehensive actions could include):** CPSR believes that the list of concrete actions that support the calls in the Declaration of Principles for human rights must include the creation of enforcement mechanisms that provide: means of ensuring accountability, effective remedy should violations occur, and effective redress against both governmental and non-governmental organizations who commit violations. It must also provide for procedural enforcement, including: the right of individuals and

groups to file formal complaints of violations, recognition of an independent tribunal to adjudicate such complaints, and the recognition as binding the opinions of the independent tribunal on the states who are party to the WSIS declaration, as well as individuals and groups within them. Implementation mechanisms must include a review and monitoring body, a special rapporteur, and an independent tribunal. The special rapporteur, as in other human rights frameworks, would be responsible for conducting independent research and evaluation of the implementation processes.

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility thanks the WSIS Secretariat and the Working Group of Sub-Committee 2 for the opportunity to make contributions to this process.

William Drake
Robert Guerra
Hans Klein
William J. McIver, Jr.
Katitza Rodriguez

WSIS Delegation
Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR)

Annex: Background on Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility

CPSR is an international, non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1981, out of concern for the potentially negative impacts on society of information technology and policies that govern their development and use. Given CPSR's mandate, it emphasizes here those aspects of the Civil Society Statement to Prepcom-2 that address support for socially responsible development and use of computer-based systems.

CPSR's primary and historic interest has been to ensure that the public and policymakers are able to make realistic assessments of not only the power and promise of information technologies, but also their limitations. Toward these ends, CPSR adheres to five principles in the work that it performs:

1. We must foster and support public discussion of, and public responsibility for decisions involving the use of computers in systems critical to society.
2. We must work to dispel popular myths about the infallibility of technological systems.
3. We must challenge the assumption that technology alone can solve political and social problems.
4. We must critically examine social and technical issues within the computer profession, both nationally and internationally.
5. We must encourage the use of information technology to improve the quality of life.