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Tunisia: Working paper

COMMENTS ON DRAFT DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES AND DRAFT ACTION PLAN OF THE FIRST PHASE OF WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society held its second meeting from 17 to 28 February 2003, and the Chairman of the Working Group of Sub-Committee 2 was asked to consolidate observations and comments by the participants in one basic working document that follows the format and language traditionally used in documents of United Nations summit conferences.

The following documents were posted on the WSIS website on 24 March 2003:

- Draft declaration of principles.
- Draft action plan.

Comments on the basic working document had to be submitted by the end of May 2003.

Tunisia considers that the structure of both documents is consistent with the structure approved by PrepCom-2 and both documents cover most areas of concern raised by participants.

Both drafts may be taken as a basis for negotiations in the Drafting Group (July 2003) and PrepCom-3 (September 2003).

Some amendments are also proposed in the Arabic text to align it with the French text in places where consistency is required to ensure the desired impact or significance. The Tunisian working paper contains two sets of comments in respect of each draft:

- substantive comments; and
- proposed editorial changes that mainly apply to the Arabic version.

DRAFT DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

Substantive comments

- 1) Stronger emphasis needs to be placed on the elements of solidarity and cooperation in order to meet the complex ever-evolving challenges of the global information society (A.6) by incorporating a text highlighting significant benefits that accrue to humanity through sharing of knowledge and expanding the number of those involved in enriching this knowledge. This would require new forms of solidarity to free human potential throughout the world and to redress the inability to learn or use ICT networks and equipment.
- 2) The text on the common vision of information society should contain:
 - a statement to the effect that the right to difference enriches humanity because it multiplies its points of reference and contributes to cultural cross-fertilization and dialogue among civilizations, all thus consolidating the foundations of world security and the culture of tolerance, cooperation and solidarity;
 - recognition of the role of women and youth along with other segments of civil society in raising awareness of the values that promote innovation and creativity among peoples for their common interest (section B).
- 3) The section on the key principles for the information society for all should stress the importance of the availability of terminal equipment at affordable cost for States, communities and individuals, and should examine in depth the provision of such equipment at the lowest cost possible in order to avoid new forms of exclusion and marginalization. (Pages 2-3)

Account should also be taken of the needs of countries in transition which are in a position to contribute to the development of softwares required for advanced equipment.
- 4) A new paragraph should be added to indicate the common need to increase the number of ICT organizations in order to draw on their contribution to build the information society and to implement the plan of action to be adopted by the Summit.
- 5) In view of the importance of the legal framework in the creation of a competitive environment based on confidence and trust among various stakeholders in the information society and the definition of their respective roles, emphasis should be placed on the continuous development of the legal and regulatory framework to cope with the rapid pace of change of the factors that condition country-specific domestic and the external environment (section 6, page 5).
- 6) In discussion content (page 6, paragraph 50) emphasis should be placed on scientific research in general and research in ICT in particular, covering both technical and human aspects, in order to build local knowledge leading to the development of content.

The development of ICT infrastructure and the provision of computers are not sufficient elements for participation in the information society and virtual economy, as digital literacy is also an essential element for the elimination of the digital divide. ICT applications require that individuals and institutions should be fully qualified to master and utilize these technologies. Moreover, rapid and profound technological changes require new policies for investment in education and continuous learning to enable employees and citizens to gain relative advantages.

- 7) In dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity emphasis should be placed on the close relationship between culture and development, on the one hand, and between the media of communication and culture and the cultural-developmental roles of communication media, on the other. Communication media play a fundamental role in passing the cultural heritage to successive generations and contribute to cultural interaction within a country. They also play an effective role in the preservation of national identity, promotion of intellectual activity and the maintenance and further development of the national language as well as the creation of opportunities for intercultural cross-fertilization and constructive dialogue.
- 8) In addition to the points raised under ethical dimensions of the information society (paragraph 52) an emphasis should be placed on the formulation of legislation and policies and the definition of ethical and moral orientations required for the development of human life in a sound society. In this context effort should be made to resolve some issues, particularly:
 - ensuring equitable distribution and provision of information and content;
 - balance between privacy and the security of the society.

Editorial comments

Paragraph 2: Change Arabic translation of "recognize".

Paragraph 3:

- Change translation of "recall our common resolve".
- Change translation of "declare".

Paragraph 17: Change translation of "stakeholders".

Paragraph 18:

- Rephrase Arabic translation.
- Change "... of all citizens and communities" to "... all social segments and communities".

Paragraph 20: Rephrase Arabic text.

Paragraph 27: Change "have a stake in" to "are concerned with".

Paragraph 28: Change Arabic translation of "venture capital".

Paragraph 30: Change translation of "all people".

Paragraph 40: Change first phrase to "to ensure maximum utilization of the full economic and social potential of the Information Society ...".

Paragraph 41:

- Change heading to "National strategic for decision-making".
- Rephrase Arabic translation of first sentence.

Paragraph 44: In heading, change "names" to "domain name".

Paragraph 46: Rephrase Arabic translation of second part of sentence.

Paragraph 48: Change " ... and enjoyment of ..." to " ... and possibilities to enjoy ...".

ACTION PLAN

Substantive comments

The draft action plan contains a long list of issues that need to be addressed at the Summit; however the following headings require further elaboration:

- Objectives and their arrangement by priority and importance.
- Strategies, programmes and methods for implementation, and the need to address each of these elements separately (methods for implementation should also cover the question of financing).
- International cooperation.
- Follow-up mechanisms.

In this respect we propose that the following comments be taken into account:

- 1) In discussing objectives benchmarks have been highlighted. In order to render these benchmarks more pertinent, account should be taken of the different levels of ICT development in the developing countries themselves. This requires the following:
 - Benchmarks should be developed for remote areas in the least developed countries.
 - Plans should be made for:
 - Creation of virtual schools and universities in disadvantaged areas.
 - Creation of virtual health centres in remote areas and going beyond merely interconnecting existing facilities.

- 2) Formulation of national strategies:

The reason national strategies to reduce the digital divide are important is that they are mainly directed to ensure the incorporation of the different countries in the information society within a specific time-frame. Therefore the following points should be taken into account:

- Evaluation studies should be made to determine the exact levels of digital gaps and the progress made by various countries in filling the various forms and manifestation of this gap. In view of the importance of this phase of action a global working group is proposed to formulate criteria for evaluation.
- The need to involve various stakeholders including network operators, service providers, manufacturers of communication and information equipment and systems, service providers, consultancy firms and specialists in the elaboration and implementation of national strategies.
- Adoption of national strategies to reduce the digital divide in three main directions:
 - development of infrastructure to handle information flow through the use of new communication services and applications and their provision to users at an affordable cost;
 - development of the legal system to facilitate the adoption of globalization strategies, the progressive introduction of free competition and the definition of the new roles of various stakeholders;
 - development of human resources to qualify them to meet the requirements of information society, upgrading human resources and formulate criteria to measure effectiveness in various areas related to technological progress. This requires the elaboration of modern education and training programmes.

- Deployment of the necessary efforts to encourage the establishment of the largest possible number of specialized organizations to develop cooperative economy, explore new vocations and promote digital culture. For this purpose national mechanisms need to be established to enhance the usefulness and sustainability of these organizations.

3) Financing

- Financing must cover self-finance through support of private sector investment and involvement of elements of the civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations, and the generation of foreign investments and allocation of loans to create small and medium-sized enterprises with government funds through initiatives sponsored by competent international organizations.

On the other hand, privatization policies that need to be adopted by a government should help finance programmes for narrowing the digital divide, in view of their positive impact on comprehensive development.

- In creating a new mechanism to finance digital development consideration should be given to the integration of existing mechanisms and the allocation of funds for these mechanisms. In the meantime, bureaucracy should not be allowed to obstruct decision-making and efforts should be made to reduce operation costs by allowing the national civil society groupings to implement small projects in remote areas.

In this context a special allocation may be made for digital development within the digital solidarity fund approved by the United Nations on 20 December 2002.

- Volunteers may be encouraged to help capacity building and opportunities may be pursued to finance model information applications to open up horizons for several countries.

Comments on drafting

Paragraph 6: Insert "unused" before "satellite" in Arabic text.

Paragraph 17: Change Arabic translation of "Stakeholders".

Paragraph 18: Rephrase line 4 in Arabic translation.

Paragraph 19:

- Change Arabic translation of "Venture capital".
- Rephrase third point in Arabic text.

Paragraph 22:

- Change "capacity building" to "capacity development" in order to highlight the need to further enhance what actually exists.
- Rephrase last line.

Paragraph 23: Change translation of "Professionals".

Paragraph 26: Change translation of "Creating a global culture".

Paragraph 27:

- Change "including freedom of expression" to "particularly freedom of expression".
- Change "legal instruments" to "legal mechanisms".

Sub-heading 6: Change translation of "Enabling".

Paragraph 29: Change translation of "software".

Paragraph 36: Rephrase first line.

Paragraph 37: Change Arabic translation of "incomes" in the last line.

Paragraph 38:

- Change "business efficiency" to "effectiveness of economic activity".
- Change "delivery of education..." to "delivery of training".
- Software should be included among mechanisms enumerated in second subparagraph.

Paragraph 45:

- Develop "examples" into ambitious objectives to be further pursued and agreed upon.
- Change "success stories" to "success models".

Change heading "C. Strategies programmes, methods for implementation" to "C. Strategies, programmes and methods for implementation".

Add a new point: Adoption of a global initiative to recycle second-hand computers by replacing some of their components with more modern parts, and resell them for modest prices.

Paragraph 47:

- Rephrase first line.
- Change "public action" to "public sector action".
- In the last line change "full ownership by all stakeholders of" to "effective participation of all stakeholders in".

Paragraph 48: Rephrase first line.

Paragraph 49: Rephrase first two lines.

Paragraph 51: Change "and best practices" to "and familiarization with best practices".

Paragraph 53:

- In first subparagraph change "government spending on" to "government investment in".
- In second subparagraph change "providing incentives" to "formulation of incentive regimes".
- In third subparagraph change "providing tax incentives" to "providing a regime of tax incentives".

Paragraph 58: Change "reporting" to "outcome of evaluation" in order to highlight the function of evaluation in reports.