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Statement to the PrepCom plenary on behalf of the Civil Society plenary

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Dear friends,

the first phase of this summit was a major step forward in developing a multi-stakeholder process on the global level. For the first time civil society and others have participated in such a way.

We have worked very hard to use this opportunity in a constructive manner. By doing so, we also have been reminding you of how a true vision of a human-centred, just and inclusive information society could and should look like.

We have to move on in this direction.

Governments can not address these issues alone. Any mechanism that does not closely associate civil society and other stakeholders is not only unacceptable in principle, it is also doomed to fail.

You all have acknowledged this. The importance of civil society participation is evoked routinely by governments and in official WSIS statements.

What we demand now is that the multi-stakeholder process is not just a nice phrase, but becomes true reality.

This seems to be the case for the working groups on internet governance and finance, where we have heard about and experienced very promising approaches.

We insist that it also becomes a reality for the rest of the summit process.

We are not convinced yet:

- The speaking time given to Civil Society reveals the ironic asymmetry between the importance theoretically given to us and the actual reality. Our speaking slots only amount to 2.7 per cent of the total plenary time!
- In order to have meaningful discussion among all stakeholders, we need to be able to speak to the points at the time they are raised. This is not the case right now, though we already had this modality during the Geneva phase!
- It is still not clear how we can contribute to the implementation of the action plan with our knowledge and our experiences.
- Meaningful participation also needs to address the large part of civil society that can not come to Tunis or Geneva. At this PrepCom, we do not even have an internet broadcast as in phase one.

We want to make very clear that our further participation is depending on some conditions:

- We insist that we don't fall back behind the highest levels of inclusiveness and participation from the first phase. Instead, we even want to improve them.
- All thematic and regional meetings have to be fully open to all interested parties.
- Whatever Political Declaration is to be adopted in Tunis, appropriate mechanisms have to guarantee that civil society is truly involved in any drafting process and supported in commenting and proposing amendments in a timely manner.
- We need modalities to ensure meaningful civil society consultation and cooperation on all areas of the stock-taking exercises and the implementation of the action plan.
- There must be a creative use of ICTs to ensure civil society participation from all over the world. We have a lot of experience with this from our own work.
- We were happy to hear about the participation fund yesterday. However, we insist that the funding is used in a transparent manner, according to the actual needs and with meaningful participation of already established civil society structures on this.

To summarize:

We are not willing to play an alibi role or lend our legitimacy to a process that excludes us from true meaningful participation. The summit can only be a summit of successes if there is substantive progress in our participation.