

Victoria Cabrera-Balleza
ISIS International Manila

Statement to WSIS PrepCom Plenary
June 25, 2004

At the conclusion of the first phase of this World Summit the international community agreed a vision and objectives, in the Declaration of Principles, which are framed around the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed objectives for sustainable development. In doing so the Geneva Summit committed to the challenge of creating an information and communications environment oriented towards the achievement of a world free of poverty and hunger.

In 2005 the Tunis Summit will coincide with the first five-year review of international progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Governments and multilateral institutions will measure the results of the WSIS process on the basis of its contribution to the achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and ensuring environmental sustainability and development of global partnerships for development.

These are key targets against which action and implementation must be measured.

We all acknowledge that ICTs can make a contribution to poverty alleviation and the realization of all human rights, including the right to development, health, education, and information thereby enabling developing countries to participate as equal partners in the global information and communication society. But our efforts are largely failing and the so-called digital divide is in fact expanding.

The model that relies primarily on international private investment to achieve those goals is not working. Markets only provide services for those who can afford them; governments are unable to correct market failures due to imposed constraints including external debt and IMF conditionalities that limit their investments in infrastructure; investment agreements constrain the delivery of public services and intellectual property regimes make technology transfers unaffordable.

These contradictions have been most obviously exposed in the case of efforts to reduce mortality from HIV/AIDS where the basic right of patients to life has been restricted by international trade rules to protect the intellectual property of manufacturers of the medicines vital for effective treatment.

Despite these failures, the Action Plan agreed in Geneva, relies to a large extent on a false logic. It assumes that investment in information and communication technology products, services and applications, will by itself contribute to the achievement of development goals. It assumes, that setting targets for rolling out the ICT infrastructure, will automatically lead to alleviation of poverty.

Civil society has a different perspective on the priorities for action needed to achieve the development goals and objectives set out in the Declaration of Principles.

We believe policies and investment must be effective from the ground-up.

People and communities must themselves be enabled to take action to improve their lives and conditions. Civil society initiatives and community-driven development projects must be supported and encouraged through improvements to the policy and regulatory environment for access to information and to the means of communications and through investment in traditional as well as new communication technologies.

WSIS II can be of enormous help in identifying the national and international obstacles and the action which is needed to address them.
