

AMARC Africa on behalf of WSIS Gender Caucus

WSIS GENDER CAUCUS COMMENTS ON THE REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE AMARC Africa 15 August 2005

The WSIS Gender Caucus welcomes the WGIG report as an important document laying out the definition of IG, the public policy issues involved in relation to IG. We note that some governance mechanisms that are quite inclusive, transparent, and multi-lateral have also been suggested. However, the GC will keenly follow how exactly the governments pick up from here and come out with actual governance mechanisms

We especially appreciate the recommendation in point 43 of the report on ensuring 'equal representation of women at all levels'.

43. Such a space or forum for dialogue (hereafter referred to as "the forum") should allow for the participation of all stakeholders from developing and developed countries on an equal footing. Gender balance should be considered a fundamental principle with the aim of achieving an equal representation of women and men at all levels. Special care should be taken to ensure diversity of participation as regards, inter alia, language, culture, professional background, involvement of indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

The WSIS GC will like to see this explicit recommendation be included in the structure for the 'forum' that is accepted at the summit. Women from all over the world have noted earlier instances where such progressive recommendations get diluted or entirely removed as actual structures are negotiated and agreed upon. We will stand firm and insist that the new age organisation that WGIG has recommended in the 'forum' is intended to be a break from the practise of renegeing on this basic commitment to gender equality, and sets a precedent in the equal representation of women at policy making levels.

As for the global policy and oversight body, we understand that governments will have to take a lead role; however, we want that the manner in which this oversight is done and policy developed be made more transparent and non-ad-hoc by laying out the complete details of the procedure, and anticipating critical situations. As for the 4 options given by WGIG, we find option 2 not acceptable, because it doesn't move far ahead of existing arrangements and does not conform to the principle of true multilateralism and transparency laid down by the Geneva documents of WSIS. Option 3, though more acceptable than 2, still has the problem that it either collapses public policy arrangements with technical and day-to-day operational issues, or does not clarify enough the structural relationship between the two (unlike in option 1 and 4). This is impractical.

An IG structure combining elements of option 1 and 4 should be a good starting point. In this context, we will like to add that though option 4 is more detailed and makes a clearer break with the present non-inclusive and non-transparent IG structures, CS is reduced to an observer role in the public policy/ oversight body, while for the same purpose it is given an advisory role in option 1.

So while we understand that governments have to take a lead in the public policy/ oversight body, with due processes clearly laid out, CS should be included in an advisory, and not an observer role. Women's equal representation in such an advisory structure is nonnegotiable from our view point.

We completely agree with the WGIG recommendations on institutional co-ordination and on structures at the regional and national levels. Governments should make explicit commitment that appropriate IG structures that are multi-stakeholder, inclusive, transparent and otherwise adequate to their objectives will be set up at regional and national levels, incorporating the progressive recommendations of WGIG especially on a 'forum', and especially in the context of ensuring "equal representation of women" at all levels.