

## **SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS**

### **STATEMENT FROM RENATE BLOEM PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE OF NGOS (CONGO)**

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Excellencies....  
Colleagues and Friends,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

After four years of intensive and often passionate negotiations, we have today reached the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. We have come a long way to face our common responsibility to bridge the digital divide and to shape information societies that are inclusive and build upon fundamental human rights.

In Geneva we set for ourselves ambitious goals and targets. The coming three days will confront us with a reality test: how far have we come in implementing the commitments taken two years ago? Is the international community honestly committed to allocating the financial resources necessary to bridge the digital divide? How do we tackle the sensitive issue of Internet governance? And how will we follow-up from here?

This Summit is unique because it is the first-ever UN Summit to be held in two parts. For civil society, it is historic because it puts into practice the multi-stakeholder approach called for by the Cardoso panel on UN-Civil Society Relations. It represents one more step forward in the evolution of UN-civil society relations that many of us would like to see progress further "from consultation to partnership". This strengthened interaction is the result of continued efforts by civil society organizations to be included in global decision-making processes, particularly on issues affecting human beings in a trans-national way and that require a new system of global governance that ought to be democratic and truly representative of the aspirations of the world's peoples.

As the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), we would like to see this important breakthrough not only maintained but consolidated. If governments, civil society, the private sector and international organizations – each with their own specific and important roles – have worked hand-in-hand for the preparation and the holding of the WSIS, then this should constitute a precedent to be repeated and carried further in other UN instances and fora.

Civil society has an undisputed diversity, which reflects the complexity and richness of our world, but at the same time it strives to be inclusive and encompass the needs and the rights of all. We call for a diversified approach to people with different needs, particularly the most vulnerable, including indigenous peoples and people with disabilities. We call for a close of all divides: gender,

economic, urban/rural and generational. We call for the respect of cultural diversity within the universal framework of human rights and for an Information Society that reflects and respects local realities and is owned by local communities.

Indeed, the multi-stakeholder approach was not an option; it was and remains a necessity. The issues on the WSIS agenda cannot be solved without the participation of civil society and the private sector. The Information Society is the society of the present and, above all, of the future. All stakeholders must have a say in its shaping. Civil society believes in a bottom-up approach and affirms that the human being stands at the heart of the Information Society. If poverty eradication is the overall objective of the international community – as recently reaffirmed by the UN Millennium Summit – then information and communication technologies must be engaged as fundamental means in the fight against poverty and not as ends in themselves. ICTs must become powerful tools to implement the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals.

The Information Society must be centred on human rights and fundamental freedoms. The right to freedom of opinion and expression – enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – is key to the Information Society that we want. The respect for this fundamental right, together with the right to privacy, the right to access public information and the recognition of Information Society as a global public good are the best foundations of a virtuous circle of development. In this way, an enabling environment will be created to fight poverty through, among other means, ICTs.

CONGO, as one of the main UN counterparts for NGOs, will work through its members and committees to streamline the commitments taken by this Summit throughout the UN system. We will make sure ICTs for development figure prominently on the agenda of relevant ECOSOC commissions and of the ECOSOC and other sessions assessing the implementation of the MDGs. This is particularly important in the light of the current UN reform process which we strongly support.

This must be the Summit of solutions. If Geneva was the "input" phase, then Tunis must be the "impact" or "output" one. However, impact will not be reached in three days and the implementation of the commitments taken will be a time consuming and demanding process that has a chance of success only if all stakeholders join forces in mutually benefiting partnerships. Only then will we have a chance to bridge the digital divide and come closer to reaching the Millennium Development Goals within the next ten years. Let this Summit not fail us!

I thank you for your attention.