

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

**REPORT FROM UNESCO PARALLEL EVENTS  
ORGANIZED AT THE SECOND PHASE OF THE  
WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to report on the very rich debates of the three parallel events that UNESCO organized during the Summit.

All of the UNESCO events promoted knowledge societies based on the principles of freedom of expression, universal access to information and knowledge, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and access to quality education for all.

The need to promote culturally diverse and people-centered content was emphasized by leading information technology thinkers and policy-makers at UNESCO's main event, the high-level round table debate on "Shaping the Future through Knowledge" hosted by the Director-General of UNESCO on 17 November.

They stressed that education is an indispensable premise for the building of knowledge societies and that UNESCO should continue with this focus. They also highlighted the need for universal access to information for all people, in all languages, and for an open internet that rests on freedom of expression and information.

Stressing that the growth of a digital society does not guarantee the development of knowledge, let alone wisdom, the participants voiced concern about the loss of vast quantities of knowledge, notably indigenous knowledge. They commented that we use old structures for new ideas, when we need to think fresh and new.

Because of the globalization of lifestyles and cultures, cultural and linguistic diversity is essential for the development and well-being of societies.

Closing the debate, the participants stressed that the information and communication tools available are far less important than the way they are used.

The Workshop on "ICT and Persons with Disabilities" held on 16 November looked at how to guarantee participation of persons with disabilities in inclusive knowledge societies.

ICT has transformed the ability of people to accelerate human development. Therefore, its potential to unleash productive capacity and facilitate social participation and empowerment is profound for persons with disabilities.

A key message from Delegates was the need to make a fundamental shift in the relationship between ICT and the disabled so that their access needs are integrated into the very design of ICT.

Participants urged governments actively to honour their commitment to the WSIS decisions related to persons with disabilities, including greater ICT investment on education and literacy, and ensuring that e-government activities take into account the needs of persons with disabilities.

They also called for support of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Round Table on "The role of UNESCO in the construction of knowledge societies through the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme" held this morning reviewed experiences in networking universities to contribute to the creation of knowledge societies, in particular through the unique initiative of the "UNESCO Chairs and Networks in ICTs".

From the outset, participants highlighted the need to include the concept of academic 'knowledge' in universal access strategies. They stressed the importance of freedom of academic knowledge creation and its independence from commercial and political influence.

In knowledge societies, academic institutions need to grasp the potential of increased cross border information and knowledge flows to ensure universal access to research results and to the creation and dissemination of technical, socioeconomic and culture practices and know how. Existing networks should be used to contribute to the implementation of the WSIS Action Plan.

Thank you for your attention