

**CIVIL SOCIETY COORDINATION GROUP**  
**Civil Society Statement to Prepcom 2**  
**on Vision, Principles, Themes and Process for WSIS**

The undersigned civil society organisations are contributing the following statement to Prepcom-2 on the vision, principles, themes and process for the World Summit on the Information Society

1. OUR VISION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION SOCIETIES<sup>1</sup>

*Our vision: Information and communication societies based on human rights and sustainable human development.*

Our vision is of information and communication societies based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other International Human Rights instruments. The developments that shape such information and communication societies should be based on the principles of social, political and economic justice, and should pursue the objectives of sustainable human development, the support for democracy, gender equality, participation, and empowerment.

We aspire to build information and communication societies where development is focused on fundamental human needs and clear social, cultural, economic, and environmental goals; where priority is given to the alleviation of poverty and other inequalities in a way that is environmentally sustainable. We support the creation of societies where human knowledge, values, beliefs, communication and organisation are considered core elements; where every citizen has the opportunity to not only access information, but also to produce it and exercise their creativity in environments that are free from violence and hatred. Further, we support the

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<sup>1</sup> There is no single information, communication or knowledge society: there are, at the local, national and global levels, possible future societies; moreover, considering communication is a critical aspect of any information society, we use in this document the phrase “information and communication societies.” For consistency with previous WSIS language, we retain the use of the phrase “Information Society” when directly referencing WSIS.

creation of societies where not only individual action, but also collective cleverness and innovation, based on cooperative work can be promoted.

The forces that drive developments in the field of information and communication should be guided by human rights standards such as equality and freedom, by recognition of information and communication resources as “commons”, by the ambition to create a dialogue among civilizations and by concern for ecological implications of technological waste.

Building people-centred and inclusive information and communication societies implies taking into account citizens and communities and involving them as participants and decision makers in shaping policies and frameworks. . It also means enabling the engagement and commitment of all generations and ensuring the involvement of diverse social and linguistic groups, cultures, and peoples in an environment of gender equality and free from any kind of discrimination or exclusion.

Finally, considering that it is through processes of globalization that conceptions of Information and Communication Societies have evolved, most participants of WSIS are convinced that information and communication technologies can play a major part in the solutions to the major global problems articulated in the UN Millennium Declaration. To realize this vision, an efficient and democratic system of good government for information and communication societies is needed. Such a system must be people-centred and guided by human rights principles.

## 2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles should guide the strategies for developing information and communication societies that respond to this vision.

### 2.1 Centrality of human rights and sustainable human development

Human rights and sustainable human development must be the cornerstone of all developments in information and communication societies. The principles of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, and especially those laid down in its sections III, IV and V (Development and Poverty Eradication, Protecting our Common Environment and Human rights, democracy and good governance) constitute the framework for evaluating these developments.

Building information and communication societies from a rights perspective implies putting human dignity, sustainable human development and the rights of today’s global citizens and future generations above technological considerations or the commercial producer-consumer relationship. In information and communication societies, democracy, participation, and empowerment must be supported. Therefore, the goal of WSIS should be achieved in reference to the human rights framework established by the United Nations and regional protection

systems, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and other international instruments adopted by member states. WSIS should explore the full range of tools, strategies and perspectives for achieving sustainable development, in accordance with guidelines such as those agreed upon in the Earth Charter, Agenda21 and the Johannesburg Declaration.

## 2.2 The Right to Communicate

Communication - understood as a participatory and interactive process essential to human coexistence, social organization, organization of human experience, democracy, human formation and citizenship and community building - should be granted as a right in information and communication societies.

Communication is a basic human need, indispensable for the organization of societies, and therefore must be at the centre of definitions for building information and communication societies. Facilitating active citizenship<sup>2</sup> through increased possibilities for human interaction and the production and exchange of information should be a priority in this process. The focus should be on people, as citizens, and the services they require, rather than on services and their “users” or “consumers”. We affirm the concepts of participation, communication and effective use in this context. Technology should be at the service of communication and information needs, not an end in itself. We refer in this context to the submission by the CRIS Campaign of a Declaration on the Right to Communicate.

## 2.3 The global information commons

Securing and extending the public domain, or global commons, is a major way of bridging the digital divide and of ensuring the minimal equitable conditions for the overall development of intellectual creativity, technological innovation, effective technology use and successful participation in information and communication societies. These are the necessary pre-conditions for actualizing the values and principles of freedom, equality, solidarity and shared responsibility adopted in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

Extending the global information commons is a means of achieving both the reduction of inequalities and the minimal equitable conditions for the stimulation of intellectual creativity and technological innovation in information and communication societies. Indigenous peoples' aspirations to protect and develop cultural and specific intellectual property rights must also be supported. Furthermore, it should be recognized that the global commons, developed as it is by

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<sup>2</sup> "Citizen" and "citizenship" are understood here to be broad concepts which include the notions of local, national, regional, and global citizens.

means of public funding and deriving from our shared physical environment, constitutes a public resource, which should not be sold for private profit.

#### 2.4 Access to information and the means of communication

Access to information and the means of communication as a public and global commons should be participatory, universal, inclusive and democratic.

In order for everyone to be able to participate in the benefits, achievements, and potentials of information and communication societies, the digital divide issue should be tackled in its broadest sense. This means addressing both the North/South digital divide and the enduring inequities within both developed and less developed nations, and generally speaking the political, cultural, ethnic, social and age barriers, along with technical, educational, gender and economic ones, that are major causes of marginalization. Embedded in all of these are inequitable gender relations. It means ensuring universal access to information essential for human development as well as to infrastructure and the most appropriate forms of information and communications technology, and encouraging social appropriation of this technology. Democratic access implies differentiating the needs of different collectivities and seeking appropriate solutions. It involves in each case determining the most appropriate communication tools and applications, including traditional communications media and community-based initiatives as well as the newest information and communication technologies. It also means developing and providing the means for the effective use of ICTs by different groups. This implies addressing diverse realities of social groups such as indigenous peoples, diasporas, migrants, those workers who have the right of mobility within large trade zones, as well as specific needs of groups such as older persons and the disabled. It also implies giving priority to community initiatives, developed in response to local needs and under community control.

If universal access to information and communication is to be realized as a means of enhancing human empowerment and development, ownership of infrastructure, ICTs, nor information and knowledge must be monopolized. The regulatory and legal framework in all information and communication societies must then be strengthened to support broad-based sharing of technologies, information, and knowledge.

#### 2.5 Promoting cultural and linguistic diversity

Respect for and promotion of multilingualism and diversity, which are fundamental to human conviviality and peace, must be at the centre of information and communication societies. In such societies there is great potential for promoting cultural and linguistic diversity and exchange, but also for imposing homogeneity. Culture is alive and evolving, therefore linguistic diversity and cultural identity do not only need to be preserved, but also actively fostered. ICTs may provide a means of sustaining languages and cultures. ICTs should also be able to support

the use of local and indigenous languages. In addition, the Internet should not only be seen as a medium where messages are carried by the written word. There is also a place for ICT development to support communication through iconography and voice recognition technology, in order to help reduce illiteracy, while not excluding illiterates from information and communication societies.

## 2.6 Incorporating a gender perspective

Gender-based analyses and perspectives must be introduced into all proposals, action plans and follow-up programmes, so that gender equality can be guaranteed in information and communication societies, as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action (including, but not limited to Section J).

## 2.7 Incorporating a youth perspective

All proposals, action plans, and follow-up programmes should incorporate the needs and contributions of youth, and young people should be engaged as participants throughout the process, as set forth in the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

## 2.8 Taking a Democratic Perspective on Information and Communication Societies

A democratic perspective on information and communication societies, in which information is crucial for citizens, is necessary in order to make choices grounded on the awareness of alternatives and opportunities. Information and communication are the foundation for transparency, debate and decision-making. They can contribute to a culture and a practice of cooperation, basis for a renewal of democracy. Information and communication technologies offer potential benefits to the world's communities that will only be exploited if there is a political will to do so.

In this spirit, the aim of WSIS “to develop a common vision and understanding of the Information Society”, and the methods to achieve such a vision, requires shared communication values and mechanisms including the right to communicate, respect for freedom of opinion and expression in all of its dimensions, and a commitment to transparency , accountability, and democracy.

### 3. THEMES

We propose the following categories and issues discussed therein as a comprehensive framework for WSIS themes, along with our identified guiding principles.

#### 3.1 Understanding the Foundations and Building the Framework

In this category, WSIS would develop a shared definition and understanding of the information society: what do we mean by it, who will benefit and what purposes will be served by its development, on what ethical bases it should function. The primary emphasis here would be on defining the role of human rights and the concept of sustainable development in information and communication societies in the context of the United Nations system in coordination with regional human rights protection systems. Integral to this, the distinct roles, priorities and responsibilities of governments, civil society, and the private sector would also be established in order to develop an efficient system of good government in information and communication societies. . The diverse realities of different types of communities would also be addressed here.

##### 3.1.1 Contributions of information and communication technologies to the opportunities for human and social development

As a basis for building a better understanding of the potential and risks of information and communication societies, WSIS would examine the particular roles and responsibilities the information society has to play in contributing to development and would consider and evaluate its social and environmental impacts. WSIS would also identify the means to ensure the broadest distribution of opportunities for human and social development and environmental protection through effective technology use within an information and communication society and the emerging technology environment on which it is based.

Themes would include: the creation of economic opportunities, including informal ones and those that are part of a third sector economy; the role of ICTs in health, agriculture, and other life-critical sectors; the role of ICT-based communication for development; training workers for Information and Communication Societies; the realities and dangers of labour exploitation in ICT-based sectors; the roles and impacts of investment and speculation in ICT-based development; and the role and limits of E-commerce in development; the impact of ICTs on employment and migration; environmental risks and potentials of ICTs, such as electronic waste, positive and rebound effects of dematerialization, and unsustainable extraction of minerals and other resources required for their manufacture; and the role of ICTs in the reclamation, preservation and future development of indigenous knowledge.

### 3.1.2 Bridging Divides to Information and Communication Societies

In this category, WSIS would address barriers to citizens and countries in accessing the Information Society. Here, WSIS would explicitly recognize a complex of different types of barriers, not just a monolithic concept of the “digital divide.” Major emphasis would be placed on addressing barriers facing the least developed countries (LDCs). Particular attention would be given to Indigenous peoples that experience a reduced socio-economic status, in most nations where they reside, even within developed nations. Other themes addressed here would include: social, economic, cultural, and educational barriers; political and social barriers; gender roles and relationships; requirements for achieving universal and equal access; information as a public good, with due consideration for and in relation to an evolution of various intellectual and cultural property; freedom of expression and of the media; supporting cultural and linguistic diversity in circumventing barriers; and the distinct roles of governments, civil society, and the private sector in bridging barriers to information and communication Societies.

### 3.1.3 Knowledge Society

In this category, WSIS would address themes that recognize the creation and management of, and access to knowledge as the key benefit to humankind of Information and Communication Societies.

Such themes would include: educational goals, distance learning, facilitating both formal and life-long learning processes, the development of information literacy, access to knowledge, support for cultural and linguistic diversity, support for the reclamation, preservation and future development of indigenous knowledge, and the needs of young people in the knowledge society. Capacity building in academia to support the knowledge society would also be addressed as well as local and diverse knowledge systems. Media in general and mass media in particular are recognized as having critical roles and responsibilities in the knowledge society.

### 3.1.4 People, Communities, and Rights

In this category, WSIS would address themes specific to citizens and communities that are not addressed by commercial perspectives on the Information Society. The main emphasis here is, on the one hand, to articulate support for people’s empowerment and for their full participation in their countries and communities; and on the other, to promote community-driven and community-based enabling initiatives including traditional and innovative uses of communication as well as information management and processing tools at the community level.

Major thematic subcategories here include: the creation of an electronic commons which would guarantee universal access to information and capacity to produce information essential to human development, free public spaces and technical resources that can be used to meet human needs;

community control of ICT infrastructures; continuing support for free software and open source technologies; capacity building; and the multiplicity of dimensions of diversity. Specific themes here would include: the empowerment of communities through ICTs; promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity; support for oral information and cultures; support for independent, community controlled media and other forms of communication; the needs of people with disabilities; needs of the young and the elderly; support for cross-cultural communications; stemming the technological “brain drain” from developing countries; content dumping, and geographic-specific themes.

### 3.1.5 Gender Perspectives

In accordance with the Millennium Declaration and other instruments adopted by the UN, WSIS must address gender perspectives within the information society as a cross-cutting issue in all aspects of the agenda and in relation to each of the themes outlined in this document. In addition, in this specific category, WSIS would focus on the broad themes of reducing gender discrimination and improving participation of women in the Information Society, capacity building and training for women, equal access, and the use of ICTs to improve the lives and livelihoods of women worldwide.

Specific themes would include: supporting wide participation by women ICT specialists and gender analysis specialists in policy formation and decision making at all levels in the ICT sector; supporting women’s greater access to and control over resources necessary for their empowerment; encouraging women to explore the convergence and between cultural and traditional forms of communication with the technologies currently available; enhancing the possibilities for women at all levels to use ICT tools for the transformation of gender hierarchies in society and to challenge stereotyped roles that women and men are expected to fulfil; using new and alternative forms of ICTs to counter the negative portrayal of women in the media, examining and addressing old and new forms of exploitation and violence against women in information and communication societies.

### 3.1.6 Youth Perspectives

In accordance with the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, youth perspectives and voices should be incorporated throughout the WSIS, cutting across themes in other categories. Young people have been at the forefront of almost every innovation in the development of information and communication societies. Yet, young people have too often been seen as a burden rather than an asset, a group to be taught but not to teach, and to receive but not to give. We must commit to including the concerns and voices of young people at all levels of decision-making that will impact their lives and the lives of generations to come.

At the same time, and to avoid the tokenization of youth concerns and voices, “Youth in

information and communication societies” should be a theme in its own right. Sub-themes would include: bringing youth into policy formation and decision making at all levels in the ICT sector; supporting youth media initiatives; using ICTs to counter the negative portrayal of youth in the mass media; youth-led, ICT enabled education; youth ICT entrepreneurship; ICT child labour in data entry, call services, and electronics assembly and disassembly; using ICTs to counter child labour, sex exploitation of girls and young women, and other old and new forms of exploitation and violence against youth in information and communication societies.

### 3.2 Developing the Framework

In this category, WSIS would establish a shared understanding of how the information society should function, be regulated, and evolve.

#### 3.2.1 Regulatory Framework

Themes would include areas such as: freedom of expression; data protection; access to information; privacy and network security; privacy in the workplace; consumer protection, especially with regard to spamming and profiling; intellectual and cultural property rights; universal access to information essential to human development, as well as public domain issues and fair use; access to public services; developing regulatory mechanisms that promote democratic participation by people; the establishment of appropriate policy, market structures and regulations for media and telecommunications ownership and concentration; and extending the rights of workers and their trade-unions to the use of the internet and intranets of companies for purpose of communications and solidarity. Defining on-line rights for on-line workers is a necessity and includes provisions to protect workers in very intrusive workplaces and under unprecedented monitoring and surveillance conditions. A regulatory framework must also address the management of communications development funds that have been established in several countries as a means of extending the deployment of ICTs to non income-yielding areas. Finally, given the borderless characteristics of ICTs, an appropriate framework for establishing the competence of jurisdictions should also be elaborated.

#### 3.2.2 Public Policies

Themes addressing the development of information and communication societies would include: policies for autonomous development of national and regional information societies; securing and extending the global information commons as a major way of bridging the digital divide; sustainable and environmentally responsible development of ICTs as well as the use of ICTs to enable sustainable and environmentally responsible development and conservation efforts worldwide; development of alternative and community-based technologies; determining the appropriate use of new and traditional ICTs; capacity building in governments, civil society, and the private sector; financing and deployment of technology; and examination of social and

regulatory impacts of this framework. Recognizing participatory design as an indispensable tool for ICT development, this category should also establish as an integral part of this framework a continuing process for the implementation and review of summit themes and principles, and mechanisms for the implementation, monitoring and enforcement of rights recognized in the information society by WSIS.

### 3.2.3 Rights, Responsibilities, and Governance

In this category, WSIS would address the rights of citizens and communities in the information society as well as the particulars of governing the Information Society. Themes would include: governance of information and communication societies in a globalised world, democratic management of international bodies dealing with ICTs, including Internet governance, with emphasis on developing and securing the global information commons and a right of universal access; democratic management of the Internet Domain Name and IP Address System, including the political as well as technical issues of the management process; a broad awareness of the societal and ethical implications throughout information and communication societies of the introduction of new protocols and standards, like the Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6) and ENUM for the mapping of telephone numbers to Internet services; information and communication rights; access to public information; privacy; the role of the media; the use of ICTs for government and decentralization; and media ownership and concentration. Effective legal mechanisms must also be made available to provide enforcement of rights and means of seeking legal remedies for violations. The main emphasis here is to articulate support for the empowerment of citizens and the reform and strengthening of democracy through the use of ICTs at all levels, from the local to the national and international. For each theme in this category would be the consideration of their social impacts.

### 3.2.4 Building the Infrastructure

In this category, WSIS would focus on the technical aspects of evolving information societies from their present state. The objective is that each community and each village in the world should have an access to the Internet. Themes would include: the extension of Internet connectivity, the development of regional backbones, wireless technologies, and other advanced ICTs to meet outstanding human needs in all societies; infrastructure needed to extend participation of the developing world in information and communication societies; continuing support for free software and open source technologies; better balanced and lower cost international route and hub repartition; building bridges between different types of media, including radio, television, print and the Internet; addressing the needs of rural communities; the use of ICTs in emergency situations, as articulated in the Tampere Convention; and supporting the deployment of community radio and television broadcasting sectors. Close cooperation between research actors and community networks should also be promoted, in order to foster new technological developments that can address social needs.

### 3.2.5 Tools, Services and Applications

In this category, WSIS would examine tools, services, and applications in the Information Society that should be pursued in addressing human needs. Major thematic subcategories here would include technologies that facilitate active citizenship and improved government; support for universal access to knowledge and global communication and cooperation; and the improvement of the standard of living adequate to the health and well-being of all citizens. Specific themes include: the building of bridges between the media: radio, television, press and Internet; ICTs for E-government, including e-governance and citizen input into political processes; support for disaster mitigation and relief operations; support for long-term data archiving for cultural preservation; and tools to facilitate cross-sector co-operation.

### 3.2.6 Environmental Stewardship

Recognizing that information and communication societies must be built on a foundation of sustainable development, safeguarding the global environmental resource is central to achieving a healthy networked community for all. Life cycle management in the production flow of ICT-related goods and services must be promoted and implemented by the global ICT sector.