

Report on the World Summit on the Information Society.

10-12 December 2003, Geneva

The [World Summit on the Information Society](#) is held in two phases. The first phase of WSIS took place in Geneva hosted by the Government of Switzerland from 10 to 12 December 2003. It addressed the broad range of themes concerning the Information Society and adopted a Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. The second phase will take place in Tunis hosted by the Government of Tunisia, from 16 to 18 November 2005.

The World Summit on the Information Society provided a unique opportunity for all key stakeholders to assemble at a high-level gathering and to develop a better understanding of the revolution of the technology and its impact on the international community. Its aims were to bring together Heads of State, Executive Heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations, media representatives and civil society in a single high-level event. The roles of the various partners (Member States, UN specialized agencies, private sector and civil society) in ensuring smooth coordination of the practical establishment of the information society around the globe, were at the heart of the Summit and its preparation. Nevertheless, a lot of question marks need to be cleared: " Who controls the international media, the private companies or an independent UN-related body?

The developing countries asked for a fund for assistance. The compromise seems to be that a fund is going to be established, but payment into it will only be voluntary. This question will be on the table again in Tunis.

Another big conflict issue was the guaranty of freedom of expression in the times of internet. Here also, the governments could not solve the question completely and went for compromise. On the other hand, one paragraph in the declaration emphasises freedom of expression. On the other hand it allows limitations and restriction of freedom of expression. During the Prepcom III, I followed some of the preparatory meetings in the discussions on the Non-Paper of the President of the WSIS Prepcom on Declaration of the Principles of the subcommittee I. The most of the times the discussions sorted the conflicts that exist between the North countries and the South ones. The main idea is that the North is not very much interested to invest on certain areas of telecommunication, and according to CRIS (Communication Rights in the Information Society), this because there is no space left for the profit (European Social Forum).

Very interesting in the context of the discussions on the plan of action, remains the presentation of women in the information society. According to China, the paragraph 10 (9) which is about the women's empowerment and the paragraph 11 (9bis) which is about the marginalized and vulnerable groups of society should be put altogether, insinuating that women are a marginalized group of the society. This paragraph took a long time of the discussions and at the end the conclusion was that it should remain at it was, without any change.

To come back to the WSIS, even though the atmosphere of this summit left some place for hope, the gap is present in every field of the information and communication. As the Secretary- General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan underlined in his speech, there is a gender divide, a commercial divide, a technological divide and so on. Talking about gender, I had the chance to participate in several panels organised by the Gender Caucus, and as in everywhere the gap exists within the gender question itself. You could have the chance to meet a woman entrepreneur that is very optimistic about the women's future in the society of the information (but she is one in a million unfortunately). On the other hand, it is the reality of the developing countries where a woman should be more than lucky to have access on the internet cafe or even to have a telephone mobile. A huge amount of the world's population, especially women and girls are still illiterate! ICT should be more than involved in the gender divide within the digital divide. But it is up to women to fight for their empowerment, in order to reach decision-making, conflict resolution, and especially human rights in order to increase opportunities for women in the information society. The main ideas of these panels were that women should get more involved to get gender rights into ICT policy at international and national level and for this they need to proceed at least on two fronts: sensitising policy makers to gender issues and sensitising gender advocates.

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