

**Civil Society Statement  
at the End of the Preparatory Process  
for the World Summit on the Information Society  
Geneva, November 14, 2003**

**I. Where do we stand now?**

We have come to the last day of PrepCom 3a. This extra week of preparatory work was necessary after governments failed to reach agreement during the supposed final preparatory conference in September 2003. In spite of the extra expenditure of time and money, the deadlock continues – and sets in already on the very first article of the declaration, where governments are not able to agree on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, as the common foundation of the summit declaration.

Through our observation of the process we have identified two main problem areas that impede progress in the WSIS:

1. How to correct imbalances in riches, imbalances of rights, imbalances of power, or imbalances of access. In particular, governments do not agree on even the principle of a financial effort to overcome the so-called Digital Divide; this is all the more difficult to accept given that the summit process was started two years ago with precisely that objective.
2. The struggle over human rights. Not even the basis of human life in dignity and equality, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, finds support as the basis for the Information Society. Governments are not able to agree on a commitment to basic human right standards as the basis for the Information Society, most prominent in this case being the freedom of expression.

These are the essential conflicts among governments, as we see them now. There is also ongoing fight over issues such as media, internet governance, limited intellectual monopolies such as copyright, Free Software, security and so on. This underlines our assessment that there is a lack of a common vision.

**II. Realpolitik or New Vision?**

The underlying struggle we see here is the old world of governments and traditional diplomacy confronting challenges and realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We recognize the problems governments face in trying to address a range of difficult, complex and politically divisive issues in the two summit documents.

But this situation just reflects power struggles that we are seeing around the world. A number of governments realize that much is at stake, and they are responding defensively and nervously. They have noticed that they can not control media content or transborder information flows anymore, nor can they lock the knowledge of the world in the legal system of so-called “intellectual property”.

Some governments are not prepared.

They fear the power of new technologies and the way people are using them to network, to create new forms of partnerships and collaboration, to share experiences and knowledge locally and globally.

This, combined with the fear and security paranoia of the past two years, compounds political uncertainty and is also played out in the WSIS process.

But: Do we want to base our vision of the information society on fear and uncertainty or on curiosity, compassion and the spirit of looking forward?

The WSIS process has slowly but constantly been moving from “information” to “society”. It was started with a technocratic infrastructure-oriented perspective in the ITU. We are proud to say that we were crucial in bringing home the idea that in the end, the information society is about people, the communication society is about social processes, and the knowledge society is about society’s values. In the end, it is not digital – it is dignity that counts.

The whole process has shown a lack of interest among some governments in forming a common vision for the information society. It is not clear if this was ever the agenda. Probably governments are just not prepared to draft a vision anyway. They are not good at that.

### **III. The limits of good faith**

This is the first time that civil society has participated in such a way in a summit preparation process. We have worked very hard to include issues that some did not expect to be included. We have had some successes, while in a number of areas we were not heard or even listened to.

If the governments want to agree, they can agree in 5 minutes. We now have the feeling that there is no political will to agree on a common vision.

Therefore we will now stop giving input to the intergovernmental documents. Our position is that we do not want to endorse documents that represent the lowest common denominator among governments – if there will be anything like that.

We have produced essential benchmarks – our ethical framework – of which we present the latest version today. The governments risk overlooking these key issues in the hairsplitting and compromise of negotiations if they do not take into account our input more seriously.

The current stalemate deepens our belief in the need for the inclusion of all stakeholders in decision-making processes. Where rulers cannot reach consensus, the voices of civil society, communities and citizens can and should provide guidance.

#### **IV. Bringing back vision into the process**

We don't need governments's permission. We take our own responsibility. Someone has to take the lead, if governments won't do it, civil society will do it.

We have now started to draft our own vision document as the result of a two-year, bottom-up, transparent and inclusive online and offline discussion process among civil society groups from all over the world.

We will present our vision at the summit in Geneva in December 2003. We invite all interested parties, from all sectors of society, to join us in open discussion and debate in a true multi-stakeholder process.

New mechanisms and structures are possible and can resolve these impasses and enable people to work together globally and inclusively.

#### **V. Looking beyond Geneva**

Without funding and real political commitment from governments, there is no real Action Plan today. But the present draft provides an agenda, a list of issues of common concern.

Governments know they cannot address these issues alone. Any mechanism for the period following Geneva that does not closely associate civil society and other stakeholders is not only unacceptable in principle, it is also doomed to fail.

Like many other actors, including some governments, we do not want the opportunities offered by the unique gathering in Geneva to be wasted. We hope to find substantial improvement for the phase leading us to the second phase of the summit in 2005.

This process is going so badly, someone has to take the initiative to save it from destruction. If governments don't - we today declare ourselves ready to assume this important responsibility with all actors sharing our concerns.

Irrespective of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society in December 2003, civil society will continue what we have been doing all the time: Doing our work, implementing and renewing our vision, working together in local and global bottom-up processes - and thereby shaping a shared and inclusive knowledge society.