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PRESS RELEASE

Gender equality and women's rights a critical issue at the World Summit for the Information Society

The voices of gender equality and women's rights advocates will be heard widely at the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS). The WSIS Civil Society Bureau has given added strength to gender advocates with the recent release of accepted names of civil society speakers at the General Debates and Roundtables of the WSIS, which is taking place next week in Geneva.

Several of the 25 confirmed speakers are known gender equality advocates who will make the case for the recognition of gender issues as a cross-cutting principle in the Information Society. Ms Muthoni Wanyeki, Executive Director of FEMNET based in Kenya, one of the selected panellists for the General Debates session of the Summit, says:

'This is certainly an opportunity to highlight the fact that Information and Communications Technologies are not gender neutral, and that the digital divide is de facto a gendered divide. The more practitioners and policymakers in the Information Society recognise this, the sooner will this be translated into programs that promote the inclusion of women and girls in the Information Society'

Gender equality and women's rights issues are included in the World Summit on the Information Society Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. These issues are recognised by the Summit as critical fundamental principles in the creation of an Information Society. However, gender activists have expressed concern that the **entire Plan of Action**, which will be adopted next week at the Summit, is still in **square brackets**, which means that these crucial paragraphs could be overturned.

The WSIS Gender Caucus --a multi-stakeholder group of women and men from governments, civil society, the private sector and the UN system, working on ensuring that gender equality and women's rights are integrated into WSIS-- is urging all government delegates attending the WSIS, to vote for gender equality and women's empowerment, and adopt all gender equality paragraphs in the in the Plan of Action. They have expressed to delegates that their "vote means that the world is one step closer to a genuinely inclusive World Information Society".

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