



## **Creating an Information Society for All requires integration of gender equality and women's human rights as a Fundamental Principle for Action**

### **Statement of the WSIS GENDER CAUCUS Dr Gillian M Marcelle, Founding Convenor**

Good afternoon and greetings to all. Excellencies, Secretary General of the ITU, President of the World Summit, ladies and gentlemen.

The WSIS Gender Caucus is a multi-stakeholder group of women and men from national governments, civil society and non-governmental organisations, the private sector and the United Nations system. It takes as a starting point the importance of aligning the WSIS process and outcomes with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and urges governments to acknowledge gender equality and women's rights as fundamental principles in the creation of an Information Society. The WSIS Gender Caucus has committed to work towards an equitable Information Society that promotes empowerment and contributes to poverty reduction; an Information Society of greater inclusion and diversity, which eliminates cultural, social, technological and economic gaps. We regard respect for fundamental human rights; gender equality, peace and environmental sustainability are the foundations for all the specific principles and actions that have been committed to as part of the Declaration and Action Plan.

### **Current realities**

It is evident that despite best intentions, the project of creating an Information Society is not working. The world requires a more high velocity approach to making ICTs relevant to major development challenges. Women's perspectives can contribute to making the difference between an Information Economy where gambling and pornography account for the most profitable applications and a true Information Society that serves human development. In our view to making that leap will require radical transformation of the ICT sector so that all people, including girls and women of all ages, participate fully, not only as consumers but as citizens. This vision requires dramatic changes in the policies, practices and values of the ICT sector and the governance of the sector.

The WSIS Gender Caucus has made its intervention from these premises. We recognise that the WSIS is an intergovernmental process and have worked with national delegations to influence their understanding of their critical role in shaping an Information Society. We are aware that texts agreed during global processes are often not living documents and urge governments to respect the commitments made during the Summit. To this end we will continue to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action. We regard partnerships among all stakeholders on the basis of mutual respect as a potentially fruitful organising principle and are committed to using this approach to creating an equitable Information Society

Our vision of an equitable Information Society is not utopian. However it does require political will and commitment. In this vision, human beings are at the centre and assertively shape technologies for their benefit. It is clear that there are significant transformations of the economic, political and cultural landscape underway. We however cannot leave this trajectory to the unfettered market forces which result in technologies serving the interest of global elites. Specifically, we must take a series of actions to align ICTs with the major development challenges of poverty, access to education, political participation, fair work, and environmental protection.

## **Recommendations for Action**

The following are key recommendations for inclusion in the WSIS Declaration of Principles, Plan of Action and Outcomes Processes.

### **Gender must be a fundamental principle for action**

The WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action should acknowledge existing gender divides and recommend action to eliminate them. Action must be taken to help individuals and communities overcome the persisting social and cultural obstacles that limit their contributions, and promote full inclusion for all women.

### **Equitable participation in decisions shaping the Information Society**

Women are agents of development and must be active in defining and leading development in the Information Society. More democratic and equitable participation will help to create a truly empowering Information Society to which all contribute and from which all can benefit. Under-represented/excluded groups must become equal partners in conceptualizing, designing and implementing technology and must actively contribute to policy and practice.

### **New and old ICTs in a multimodal approach**

A multimodal approach is needed to increase access to new and traditional ICTs. This will ensure that traditional modes of communication and information sharing, and new technologies are provided equitably. This is crucial for poor women in developing countries who are making effective use of simple and affordable communication tools for development: their efforts must be acknowledged and strengthened. Local content and applications development, in a variety of languages, must be facilitated, and support given to community radio and women's information and communication centres.

### **Designing ICTs to serve people**

ICTs are not gender-neutral. Products and services shape people and nations. Decisive action must ensure that ICTs evolve in response to the needs/interests of the majority of the world's population. Women and currently under-represented groups should be equitably represented in technology research, design and development and encouraged through appropriate, targeted education in this area.

### **Empowerment for full participation**

Targeted and ongoing action is needed at all levels to strengthen women's and girls' capacities to be effective users of ICTs, and developers and shapers of technology, the problems it addresses, and the manner in which it is integrated in society.

### **Research analysis and evaluation to guide action**

Governments and other stakeholders must apply creative research and evaluation techniques to measure and monitor impacts - intended and unintended - on women generally and subgroups of women. At minimum, governments and others should collect information disaggregated by sex, income, age, location and other relevant factors. On the basis of these data, and applying a gender perspective, we should intervene and be proactive in ensuring that the impacts of ICTs are beneficial to all people.

## What has been achieved by the WSIS Gender Caucus?

In the 18 months since formation, the WSIS Gender Caucus has worked tirelessly. Our work to transform the ICT sector has only just begun and will continue. During the first Phase of the Summit gender advocates achieved many strategic objectives and made a significant contribution to shaping the vision of an Information Society which is reflected in the Declaration and Action Plan.

Among the notable contributions are the following:-

- Active participation in influencing the negotiations by contributing language for the Declaration and Action Plan, many of the constructive proposals has been accepted.
- Organisation of a Series of events and activities enabling decision makers to interact with gender advocates and scholars on alternative visions of the information Society and concrete case-studies of how ICTs can contribute to development and the difficulties faced by the world's poor and marginalized in benefiting from the information economy as it is presently structured.
- Showcasing projects on women's applications of ICTs for mobilization, peace and conflict resolution, enterprise creation, trade, education, and health.
- Critical analyses of the necessary institutional reforms needed to reshape the ICT sector so that it is more inclusive and diverse and more aligned with human development values.
- Recognition that an Information Society the serves humanity will require different resource allocation mechanisms. To this end, UNIFEM through its Digital Diaspora Initiative has announced the setting up of an E-Quality Fund for African Women and Innovation which will provide flexible funding to ensure that African women have opportunities for capacity development and economic security in the Information Society that is emerging.
- Development of a portal containing useful resources on gender equality advocacy in the ICTs arena. [www.genderwsis.org](http://www.genderwsis.org)
- Energizing and focusing of a committed group of gender advocates who are committed to working with all partners, including governments, international agencies, the private sector and civil society to work collectively to build and Information Society that benefits all of humanity.
- An organised network of gender equality advocates who have support from core Nordic partners (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) and UNIFEM to intervene in both phases of the Summit.
- A global platform for reporting back to development community and women's organisations so that governments are made accountable for the commitments made during WSIS.

Thank you.

*Friday, 12 December 2003*

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