



WSIS Gender Caucus Statement – PrepCom 3 (Geneva, 15-26 September 2003)

Honorable Chair, and Honored Delegates: I am pleased to speak on behalf of the WSIS Gender Caucus, a multi-stakeholder group of women and men from national governments, civil society organizations, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and the United Nations system, who are working together to integrate gender issues in the WSIS process and outcomes.

The Gender Caucus takes as a starting point the importance of aligning the WSIS process and outcomes with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We urge governments to acknowledge gender equality and women's rights as a central and cross-cutting principle. This means acknowledgement of the ways that girls and women of all ages can contribute to, as well as benefit from, the Information Society, and it means that the WSIS Plan of Action should ensure that all areas outlined in the Plan take into consideration what women and girls need to overcome existing divides, access information, and effectively create, utilize, and benefit from information.

The Information Society that we envision should reflect widespread empowerment through information and communication. New and traditional ICTs utilized in information gathering and dissemination, as well as in communications, should work to eliminate existing cultural, social, technological, and economic gaps. The Information Society envisioned in the Plan of Action should promote economic and social development grounded in respect for fundamental human rights, including equality and environmental sustainability. Specifically, the WSIS Gender Caucus urges Government Representatives to integrate the following concerns in the WSIS Plan of Action:

1. The WSIS Plan of Action should acknowledge existing gender divides and include actions that work to eliminate them. In addition, proactive steps should be taken to help individuals and communities overcome the lingering social and cultural obstacles that limit their effective participation so that the emerging Information Society benefits from the contributions of girls and women of all ages.
2. To create a truly empowering Information Society in which all people contribute and benefit, envisioning currently excluded groups only as users is not enough. They must be actors, producers and contributors to policy and practice, and will bring innovation to these arenas through knowledge production.
3. In the emerging Information Society, consideration of a broad range of ICTs—new and traditional—is a key ingredient in reaching and involving women and men in all settings. New technologies offer much promise, and equitable access, use, and benefits to them must be assured. However, the current availability of traditional ICTs should be acknowledged and expanded—that is radio, video, telephone, and print—and the successes and familiarity that some communities have with them should form a foundation to the new Information Society. To ensure an Information Society that reaches and benefits all, therefore, a combination of new and traditional technologies

should be integral to technology expansion and use. In addition, encouragement and facilitation of local content development in a variety of languages is vital.

4. Rather than considering ICTs as neutral tools or static products to which we must shape people and nations, we must envision and take concrete action on ways that ICTs can evolve to better respond to the needs and interests of all of the world's population. Women and currently under-represented groups should be provided with targeted and high quality education around effective ICT use. In addition, formal and informal barriers for women in entry and retention in the technology sector must be eliminated so that they are equally represented as developers and shapers of the way that technology looks, the problems it addresses, and the manner in which it is implemented.
5. Governments and other sectors should establish the appropriate gender-specific data and reporting mechanisms to monitor the impact of policy and actions adopted. In addition, these entities should collect data on women's participation in the Information Society and carry out research to identify the impacts of exclusion and opportunities for increased participation

As a guiding principle, the WSIS Gender Caucus urges you to remember that this new Information Society in which empowerment of all peoples, including girls and women of all ages, and the elimination of existing cultural, social, technological, and economic gaps, including the gender divide, must be founded upon the widespread availability of information and communication in forms that are useful and accessible to a wide range of individuals and communities. To ensure this, girls and women must be equally represented among those who develop and contribute to the information pool.

The current "Information Society" contains many barriers to women's and girls' full participation. As we move forward to create a more equitable and sustainable society, we must remember that new and traditional technologies are tools, not an end. Our goal is an Information Society that benefits from and involves all peoples, including girls and women of all ages. To achieve this, technologies must be developed and implemented for a variety of contexts and appropriate and accessible to all people. Without clear and forward-thinking goals relating to this, rather than see the elimination of current gaps, an entrenchment of those gaps is assured and the Information Society that we are building will lack the myriad contributions that half the world can make to it. The sustainability and effectiveness of the Information Society rides on the full and equal engagement of women and girls. As government representatives, you have a critical role in ensuring that the actions laid out benefit and involve girls and women by visibly and integrally addressing their needs and contributions.