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## **World Summit Preparatory Meeting Votes in Favour of Gender Equality**

The threat of removing or diluting an important paragraph on promoting gender equality in the Information Society was overturned yesterday when the Third Preparatory Committee (Prepcom) Resumed Session adopted the '*gender equality*' Paragraph 10 of the Non-Paper of the President of the WSIS Prepcom on the Declaration of Principles. The paragraph now reads thus:

*"We affirm that development of ICTs provides enormous promise for women, who should be an integral part of and key actors, in the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis on equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. We should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICTs as a tool to that end"*

This paragraph now forms an integral part of the WSIS Declaration of Principles. The South African government delegation was among the first to respond to a proposal for its dilution by motivating not only for its retention but also for the insertion of the word 'equality' into the text. This was supported by a number of government delegations including Canada, India Norway and Switzerland.

Says Shafika Isaacs, a representative on the Steering Committee of the WSIS Gender Caucus attending the Preparatory Meeting: '*Given the status of the WSIS Declaration of Principles, the adoption of this paragraph is now a crucial reference point in our interventions at national, regional and international levels as we endeavour to promote gender inclusion and the empowerment of women and girls in policy development and in the implementation of projects.*'

The adoption of the paragraph is indeed a triumphant outcome of concerted effort by all gender equality advocates, who have lobbied intensely to promote gender equality and women's rights since the inception of the WSIS process. It is unquestionably a victory which has to be defended.

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