

WSIS Gender Caucus  
Statement to Roundtable #4  
Tuesday 18th February 2003  
Presented by Gillian M Marcelle

Madam Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to thank the organizers of this panel for affording me the opportunity to address you this afternoon. My name is Gillian Marcelle, and I am speaking on behalf of the WSIS Gender Caucus.

The Caucus is a multistakeholder partnership, which aims to ensure that women's rights and gender-equality perspectives are integrated into every facet of the Summit and its outcomes.

I wish to begin my remarks with a quote

?We stand on the brink of a new era in which we must make fundamental choices about what life in the Information Society will be like. We may not be entirely able to predict how it will manifest itself, but we must embrace it if we wish to ensure the basic principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and embraced in the Millennium Development Goals, are fulfilled.?

This quote comes from Mr Yoshio Utsumi , Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union, the lead agency charged with planning for the World Summit on the Information Society.

The WSIS Gender Caucus emphasizes that these noble intentions will not be met, unless, there

is urgent attention and action taken to integrate women's rights and gender perspectives in every aspect of the Summit and its outcomes.

The majority of world population still lives in poverty and remains untouched by the benefits of ICT. There are critical disparities between and within countries and among groups within countries and regions. One of the most overlooked and ignored disparities is the one that exists between men and women. Unequal power relations in our societies contribute to differential access, participation and treatment for men and women in the Information Society.

These inequalities in access to and control of ICT between men and women limit the potential of an Information Society to make the most valuable contribution to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. Without women's participation in decision-making in all spheres of life and all levels of society, poverty will not be eradicated, nor will fully democratic societies be created. Limited access to ICT for women also has the effect of reducing countries' competitiveness in the global market.

It is possible to meet the challenge of integrating women's rights and gender equality in WSIS and its outcomes, if we take the following urgent and concerted actions:

1. Include gender perspectives in every facet of the Summit - from policy and planning to action, monitoring and evaluation, and also include targets for the participation of women;
2. Ensure active participation of gender equality advocates in the preparatory process of the WSIS and the Summit itself to ensure that global ICT

policy integrates gender equality goals; including, through providing adequate and targeted funding to increase participation of women delegates from women's rights and gender-equality advocacy organisations

3. Include women as leaders and decision-makers in all planning processes for the Summit;

4. Facilitate and encourage participation of women as members of national delegations and representatives of civil society and business by setting targets for delegations to include at least 30 percent women including gender and ICT experts;

5. Implement an information dissemination campaign on the Summit that includes a wide range of media such as radio, drama and print, and in a variety of languages.

The WSIS Gender Caucus has been involved in many activities to support the implement of these recommendations. Progress is being made, I can report on a national preparation process in South Africa, where the Office on the Status of Women, together with Communications Ministry officials and other stakeholders organized a consultation process on mainstreaming gender-equality perspectives into their country's preparations for the upcoming CSW and WSIS. There are hopefully many similar examples from around the world.

The WSIS-Gender Caucus affirms its support for the objectives of WSIS and reiterates its view that integrating gender equality issues are a critical means as well as a goal in creating a World Information Society that supports and promotes human development and improvement in

quality of life. We believe that if there is appropriate attention paid to the inclusion of gender equality and women's perspectives, the World Information Society will benefit by facilitating the inclusion of women's leadership, communication styles and values. These perspectives will add richly to the concept of a World Information Society and enable the achievement of operational goals. Without a gender dimension, ICTs will not serve human development needs.

It is essential that women's rights and gender-quality be taken seriously as a legitimate part of the Summit and its outcomes. Without this change, it will not be possible for this Summit, to meet the goals set out by Mr Utsumi's in my earlier quote. To define and create an Information Society that reflects highest aspirations for protection and promotion of Universal Human Rights and to make a contribution to the Millennium Development Goals, inclusion of women's rights and gender-equality perspectives as a cross-cutting issue is non-negotiable.