International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

QUALITY JOURNALISM FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

POLICY STATEMENT TO THE UNITED NATIONS WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

January 2003

1. INTRODUCTION

The International Federation of Journalists, the world's largest journalists' group, representing a workforce of more than 500,000 in the media worldwide, welcomes the United Nations initiative to hold a World Summit to agree an action programme on the creation of a fair, democratic and accessible information society for all.

The information revolution provides an opportunity to renew and reinvigorate the structures of democracy, particularly by providing easier access to information, more efficient public services, and increased public participation in decision-making. With the right approach new communications networks can increase productivity and competitiveness of national economies and stimulate economic growth and job creation in the global economy.

Used properly, information technology can be a tool of empowerment for ordinary people giving them greater understanding of their rights and can encourage greater self-confidence, assertiveness and more involvement in the exercise of democracy. However, the problem of exclusion of certain sections of society is a matter of the first priority and requires a political commitment to universal service/access.

Above all, the information society provides an unprecedented opportunity to expand the media landscape and to strengthen democratic pluralism through rapid citizens' access to new areas of quality journalism with the capacity to influence policymaking at local, national and regional level.

Although the information society has the potential to improve the quality of people's lives, this will not happen unless the right choices are made to frame if policy to suit society's needs for social inclusion, cultural diversity and equality and public confidence will not grow unless more is done to guarantee people's rights and to engage them in the debate over the consequences of change.

The cultural, social and democratic objectives of a new information society cannot be met by relying solely on the global market place. A market only approach will drive down employment rights, stifle creativity, lower quality, and reinforce existing divisions within society at large.

It will also lead to greater media concentration and undue influence by global media conglomerates, outside the orbit of democratic accountability, on cultural, political and public life.

If the information society is to succeed, it must end the isolation of people in the poorer regions of the world and help to bridge the widening gap between rich and poor that exists in every country. Poverty reduction and improvements in public services, including public media, are essential if the information society is to have lasting meaning for people around the world.

OUR AIMS: ACCESS, PLURALISM AND UNIVERSAL SERVICE

The information society must be developed within a framework that ensures easy and free access to and communication of information. Access to information also ensures fair competition and a balanced economic environment. Controlling access leads to abuse of economic and political power.

Guaranteeing diversity in ownership and in information and communication services is a key principle supported by the IFJ and the world trade union movement.

The IFJ will argue strongly for the concept of universality in the provision of telecommunications networks and services. As the information sector of national economies expands and as the international economy becomes dependent on global networks, everyone must have easy and affordable access to broadband services to obtain employment, enjoy leisure, receive information and exercise citizenship.

A key feature of universal service is the continuation and expansion of public service broadcasting. Public service values should apply to private and state broadcasting services and should be a model of quality and pluralistic communications accessible to everyone. Professional criteria should be elaborated whereby the public service duties of media, irrespective of ownership, should be defined and strengthened.

The IFJ is particularly conscious of the global implications of a new information infrastructure. And we see the impact everywhere:

- **News and information** sources are already dominated by northern media conglomerates and the voices of people of the south are rarely heard. This gulf in information resources must be bridged.

- **Culture and entertainment** resources are swamped by an increasingly mono-cultural vision of the world at the expense of diversity. This imbalance must be rectified.

- **Quality of information** is being ravaged by excessive commercialisation and a failure to invest in professional journalism in order to maintain safe and equitable conditions of work for media staff.

In countries where network competition exists a variety of operators are involved in the creation of the information society. However, it is essential that all such operators provide full two-way broadband service. Anyone who owns a network capable of offering multi-channel services should only be allowed to sell services on certain "must-carry" conditions.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS

Governments have a vital role to play in the creation of the information society. They must begin by recognising that the information society is a democratic process and that all obstacles to freedom of expression and opinion and to the free exercise of journalism must be removed.

Governments must create the legislative and regulatory framework most likely to promote the building of the information society, ensuring at the same time fair competition and pluralism of services.

Governments must also ensure a new definition of universal service in the context of broadband networks. There must be specific obligation in terms of geography, price and quality of service and effective regulatory mechanisms for ensuring that these obligations are met.

Governments must act to safeguard and develop genuine public service broadcasting systems at national level that are accessible to all citizens and to engage with civil society through support, with public funds, for community-based networks.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The global implications of the information society require bold new international initiatives in the field of regulation and defence of society's interests. All the relevant agencies of the United Nations, including the ILO, WIPO, UNESCO, ITU, and those concerned with development should prepare an integrated plan of action to:

- **Ensure** that people in least developed countries have access to the technology which will enhance the quality of their lives and assist them in the process of economic and social development;

- **Put in place** international regulations as required to guarantee access, pluralism and fair competition.

- **Strengthen** and enforce existing standards and conventions protecting the rights of workers and creators.

RIGHTS AT WORK

There is still little understanding of the impact on employment of the creation of the information society. It is essential to know, as traditional media converge with new and innovative information technologies and services, which jobs may disappear, where jobs will be created and how best to adapt to change while at the same time protecting and enhancing quality of information, promoting employment growth and elevating living standards. The social impact of the information society should be subject to critical examination. There is still a need to incorporate more women's views in news coverage and to increase the channels for the dissemination of female points of view, especially when reporting on globalisation issues, politics, the economy, business and science**.**

The IFJ, which has been representing journalists since 1926, welcomes the challenges of the information society without question. It is an epoch of change that offers the potential to expand the vision of journalism beyond the narrow territories defined by traditional media structures. The information society offers great opportunities for the extension of journalism as a force for democratic exchange.

We believe the enclosed submission, which sets out the demands of journalists on the social and cultural objectives to be embedded in the way in which the information society is built, provides an opportunity to ensure that technology is harnessed to meet the needs of humanity and is developed to provide the quality of information that people need to give their lives meaning and fulfilment.

2. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

1. National and international regulation must ensure that citizens are able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression without undue interference from political or economic pressure.

2. People are entitled to receive reliable and accurate information that is not in contravention with national laws governing free expression. Existing rules and standards providing for freedom of expression and opinion and protection of cultural rights (against pornography, racism and ethnic hatred, incitement to violence, etc) must apply to all information services made available for public consumption.

3. It may be increasingly unrealistic, as technology develops, to believe that information flows can ultimately be controlled. Fewer controls do expand standards of freedom of expression, but may also call into question existing national legal standards, which prohibit the dissemination of certain information, such as child pornography, racist material, and information advocating violence.

4. However, freedom of expression rights and freedom of choice for consumers requires that flexible and not intrusive systems of content control should be considered. (See Ethics, Training and Self-Regulation)

Recommendations

> *All citizens must be guaranteed the right freedom of expression including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information without interference, according to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

> *Citizens' rights of access to public information should be further guaranteed through common Freedom of Information laws in all member states of the United Nations. Governments should adopt a legal basis for freedom of information, allowing public access to official information, including in electronic form, at all levels of government.*

> *New mechanisms should be established, based upon self-regulation or co-regulation, to ensure that existing standards of regulation concerning content and quality of information will apply in the new digital environment.*

5. National and international regulation must ensure that citizens are able to exercise these rights.

6. All citizens and communities must have the opportunity to participate in the information society and have access to a **universal service**. This can be usefully defined as setting the goal of making available to all people basic communication and information services.

7. Such an objective must go beyond simply providing access to telephones and televisions. The concept must be redefined and expanded to take account of technological developments and the needs of society. If necessary, support frameworks should be established, financed from public sources, to provide incentives and mechanisms to meet needs.

Recommendations

Laws and regulations should be formulated according to common rules and should be based upon accepted principles of access, whereby, all citizens can participate in the information society and have access to basic communication and information services. This must mean:

- *Fair access for all, regardless of geography, and an operational framework which provides access for all groups, including those with disabilities;*

- *Service capabilities for all schools, hospitals, libraries and community institutions.*

8. The price to be paid for the increase in comfort, speed and range of services available in the information society will be a loss of anonymity and a loss of **privacy**. Travellers in the information society may be monitored and followed every step of the way. Their movements are entered into continuously expanding databases created by financial and commercial institutions. While people may not object to this when it is explained to them, they should have the choice.

9. The urge to collect personal information is strong within both the public and private sectors. The authorities, whether for reasons of law enforcement or for other reasons of public safety, have an interest in access to information about citizens.

10. Since September 11th 2001 and the launching of the "war on terrorism" a significant number of countries have instituted new laws and regulations controlling the flow of Internet traffic and putting under surveillance. (The IFJ has published in 2002 an extensive report – *Journalism and the War on Terrorism* – which explores how these actions threaten fundamental civil liberties and may undermine the fabric of journalistic inquiry.)

11. It is essential to the mission of journalism that media organisations, too, for reasons of legitimate journalistic inquiry, are able to have access to personal information. The journalist's right to collect and store information is an essential element in the journalistic process, which must be protected from outside interference. In this regard journalists must have legal protection for the right to **protect sources of information.**

12. At the same time, protection of the individual requires that official access to private information must be strictly monitored and subject to public, accountable and transparent rules. The IFJ believes that international policy should ensure:

- That the collection and retention of identifiable information is kept to a minimum.

- That information systems should also give individuals the right themselves to decide whether their identity should be revealed or maintained in a personal information system or databank.

- That citizens should have access to technology and software which allows them to preserve the privacy of their public and personal communications.

13. The conditions under which personal data can be collected and processed, as defined by national data protection rules, must be reaffirmed and further developed to meet the needs of the information society.

Recommendations

The increasing evidence of governmental interference in the monitoring and control of Internet data traffic threatens citizens' rights to freedom of expression and exposes the lack of uniform, legal protections for communications privacy on an international level. All intergovernmental agencies need to address this policy vacuum urgently.

The United Nations should adopt a policy programme embracing these principles and should set target dates for the elaboration of regulation and for the adoption of national and international standards to meet these goals.

The rights of journalists to gather, store and disseminate information in the public interest do not contradict the general need for privacy protection and laws should be introduced that protect journalists' rights in this area including the right to maintain confidentiality of information sources.

ETHICS, TRAINING AND SELF REGULATION

14. Quality of information can be guaranteed by increased support for independent, professional media working to the highest ethical and professional standards.

15. In addition, for information to be useful and for its credibility to be adequately tested, information service providers should be obliged to make known the origins and the ownership status of all information made available to the public.

16. The role of media in establishing the viability and credibility of information flowing from institutions, whether political or private, at all levels is an essential guarantor of citizen's right to know and must be a constant reference point in the elaboration of information society policy.

17. The challenge to media is to establish a framework whereby the traditional role of journalism in providing a professional "filtering" process is extended to the gathering, storing and dissemination of all electronic information. This will require new initiatives in the field of **journalism training**, particularly targeted at freelance journalists and those working in the online environment.

18. Codes of professional conduct and structures which maintain standards of content provide an important basis for self-regulation in this area. Urgent consideration must be given to adapting existing structures to meet the new media conditions.

19. It is essential to evaluate the various categories of new services and to consider their cultural significance and their contribution to the democratic process. There is an important distinction to be made between services available for public consumption and private on-line transmissions.

20. The IFJ insists that self-regulation provides the most effective, professional and democratic way of maintaining quality and standards in journalism. We recommend strongly that existing self-regulation procedures be strengthened to take account of new information services and cross-border publication. In some cases, where agreed by media professionals, forms of co-regulation to enforce self-regulatory decisions may be acceptable.

21. In order to safeguard quality and professionalism **editorial independence** must be applied in the new information services. In this regard, the study of existing codes, for instance covering editorial content or advertising, and their effectiveness in maintaining standards would be useful.

Companies and governments should adopt gender-sensitive editorial policies reflecting gender equality.

Recommendation

> *The IFJ recommends the World Summit to promote professional self-regulation and voluntary methods of setting and maintaining standards of journalistic content by initiating and encouraging activities that promote editorial independence and professionalism through:*
>
> ***Training programmes*** *for content providers to try to ensure a minimum set of standards in the gathering, preparation and dissemination of reliable information in a digital environment;*
>
> ***Compilation and evaluation*** *of existing codes and standards applied to information services made available for public consumption.*

3. PLURALISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

22. Journalists and content providers fear that the information society, with its likely concentration of ownership and vertical integration, may undermine media pluralism. Fresh thought must be given to existing laws that promote fair and competitive market conditions and those that guarantee pluralism of opinion and freedom of access. Services available on the open market

alone will not be sufficient to guarantee the level of pluralism necessary to prevent social exclusion within society.

States will have to consider whether new forms of intervention to support media services are needed, perhaps building upon existing models of public service broadcasting. Initially work will have to be carried out to identify needs. Funding such services may require a mix of private and public resources.

23. The United Nations has recognised – through the UNESCO series of regional conferences on media pluralism – the importance attached to the requirements of a democratic society, such as notably, the respect for pluralism in the media and for freedom of expression.

Recommendation

> *The IFJ recommends the World Summit to support, through UNESCO, investigations into the legal and professional conditions required to maintain the conditions for media pluralism at national, regional and international level and to make recommendations for actions in order to preserve and promote minority cultures and diversity of opinion and to prevent the establishment of monopolistic positions, which can restrict the free flow of information, services and programmes.*

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

24. There has been much discussion, prompted by the private sector, about the future of public service broadcasting. While the question of pluralism is not necessarily related to ownership, it does need to be judged according to professional independence, quality, integrity of information, and the variety of genuine choices a consumer is able to make.

25. Public service broadcasting, which is exercised free of state and governmental interference, remains a critical and valuable link in the media quality chain, providing pluralism, diversity and professionalism.

26. It is not proven that public service broadcasting provides any obstacle to the operation of the media market. Indeed, public broadcasting may compensate for market deficiencies in coverage and provides an extra dimension of competition, promoting an arena of innovation from which other players benefit.

Recommendation

> *The IFJ calls on the World Summit to*
>
> - *Reaffirm that continued existence of specific legal regulations for broadcasting is necessary to maintain plurality of opinion, quality of service and to support specific cultural identities.*
>
> - *Endorse the principle that criteria for definition of public service broadcasting, which may include service providers not financed from public sources, established*

at national or regional level, should take account of funding, management and constitution and should exempt public broadcasters from rules on concentration and cross ownership while placing on them an obligation on them to promote pluralism and add to diversity.

OWNERSHIP RULES AND MEDIA CONCENTRATION

27. Media concentration can be damaging to pluralism and freedom of expression and regulations, sometimes based upon different concepts of "internal" and "external" pluralism, are required to protect the public from undue influence by a single media conglomerate. Such rules must apply to all service providers dealing with content, the packaging of content and transmission, whether by satellite, cable or terrestrial means.

28. The process of vertical integration, which integrates different stages of the production and distribution chain, is worrying for media pluralism and access to information in the information society. For the sake of media pluralism and competition programme services and infrastructure services should be independent from each other.

29. In order to guarantee media pluralism, strict ownership rules must apply to all providers of services. Within national boundaries undue control of the advertising market by one operator or by the government must be prohibited.

30. Cross ownership rules should be devised which allow cross ownership but restrict its exploitation. Where there are rules, these should be applied fairly across all relevant sectors, including traditional media in both publishing and broadcasting, and should aim at fostering the development of new services and promoting economic growth.

31. Competition and ownership rules are further required to avoid creating and unfair market domination by a handful of players in the industry. In particular, plurality, quality of service and rights of access requires a policy approach which sets standards for fair, reasonable, non-discriminatory and open access for content providers to distribution systems.

   Such standards should be a safeguard against companies in control of distribution networks using their position as "gatekeepers" to distribute mainly services provided by their own media group. Market information gathered through control of distribution networks must be made freely available to all content providers using the network.

   Laws are required to regulate conditional access systems in order to ensure fair and transparent rights of access for content providers. In defence of media pluralism and fair competition, the IFJ believes that programme services and infrastructure services should be independent from each other.

32. The challenge is to define a new international and political architecture whereby social and democratic obligations can be met without unnecessary restriction of the international information and communications marketplace but, at the same time, to ensure that new media services reflect expressions of common and public interest.

Recommendation

The IFJ calls on the World Summit to recognise that news and information have a special cultural and democratic value distinct from that of other economic commodities. Concentration and ownership rules for media, beyond competition rules required for other economic sectors, should be established for mass media to guard against monopolisation and to protect pluralism.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND WORKERS RIGHTS

33. One key development in the information society for journalists is the threat that is posed to the intellectual property rights of authors and creators. The long-established principles of authors' rights as defined in international standards and conventions must be adapted and expanded to cover new information services. In particular, systems for global protection of intellectual property must be created and enforced.

34. Journalists strongly support the preservation and enhancement of the economic and moral intellectual property rights of authors. This is a key element in any strategy to maintain high standards of media content. Without adequate IPR protection quality in journalism, innovation and creativity will suffer.

35. The IFJ respects the needs of users and of public rights of access to information through public libraries. Such services should be strengthened by the use of communication technologies, but this should not lead to any weakening of intellectual property protection for authors and writers.

36. Some employers use authors' rights as justification for more copyright protection legislation while, at the same time, they try to impose punitive contractual arrangements on writers. Such an approach may lead users such as librarians to view the copyright community as monolithic when, in fact, writers are among those seeking greater access to information.

37. At the same time, the IFJ notes that converging technologies are changing the nature of journalism and the conditions in which journalists work. Increasingly traditional rights and definitions of work are being altered, often without proper consultation with the workforce. The IFJ shares the concern of the global trade union movement about the need for new actions to protect the rights of workers in the information industries, particularly freelance staff and teleworkers.

38. The IFJ further shares the concern of the global trade union movement of the need to remove the obstacles prevailing in the information society for women who want to go ahead with a career in journalism. Lack of equal pay, lack of access to further training, lack of fair promotion issues, job segregation and other issues have to be fought against by men and women.

39. The IFJ is convinced that the enforcement of international rules and standards as agreed at the level of the ILO and UNESCO are essential to preserving the social and professional

conditions necessary to maintain quality and living standards for those who are professionally engaged in building the information society.

40. The information society is an important building block in the creation of architecture for globalisation and new world trade arrangements. Codes of conduct and initiatives such as the Global Compact of United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan provide opportunities to enhance public confidence in the idea that globalisation can bring about social protection and prosperity for all.

41. More action is needed to encourage international corporations to enforce core labour standards and to respect human rights.

Recommendation

The IFJ calls on the World Summit to

- *Support actions to defend and enhance the established and traditional intellectual property rights of journalists and other creators in the context of new information services*
- *Recognise that the quality of information society services depends upon safe, secure and fair working conditions for all who work in the information, communications and cultural industries.*
- *Promote the following priorities in law and collective bargaining to:*

  Provide a legal and regulatory framework to protect the social and employment rights of freelance workers and teleworkers;

  Ensure that all employees -- part time, full time or freelance -- are entitled to receive the benefits of national, and international social legislation and that all employees benefit from gender equality policies;

  Guarantee trades unions the right to represent the interests of all such employees, including those working from remote locations.

  Insist that changes in training and the organisation of work are carried out by negotiation with trade unions and that there is an integrated approach to the development of required training programmes.

COMBATING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

42. While information technologies remain the preserve of a relatively wealthy, well educated and privileged elite there will be a social and democratic deficit that will be potentially damaging to the existing fabric of society.

43. The reality worldwide – even in the industrialised countries – is that economic disparities still exist between geographical areas and between sections of the population. Studies of current users of 'virtual communities' using the Internet show that the majority tend to be male, relatively young, with high levels of income and education.

44. Technological changes could deepen existing geographical and social disparities, and further disadvantage people already in a weaker position relative to other sections of society. On the other hand, people's lives could be enhanced through improved access to information and communications services. Information technologies can be utilised, for instance, to meet the needs of disabled people currently isolated and excluded from employment opportunities and social contact.

45. Nevertheless, it should be possible to develop an overall framework for universal service which could subsequently be developed in more detail as technologies develop and as users' needs can be better defined. This should include open access to networks, with network operators being required to offer access on equal and non-discriminatory terms to all service providers.

46. A major concern is that commercial or market forces may lead to concentration of investment in high bandwidth infrastructure in geographical areas which appear most profitable, offering added-value services to people in these areas, to the detriment of those outside.

47. Therefore, ways of ensuring the affordability of access and usage of advanced information and communication services need to be examined. Some studies conclude that, as affordable access at home may not be achievable in the short term, this could be achieved through local centres within communities, for instance in libraries, community centres, and schools.

Recommendation

> *The IFJ calls on the World Summit to investigate whether social obligations could be attached to the licences awarded to network and service operators.*
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> *These could cover obligations such as connection to networks, access to services at affordable levels, or the provision of services to specific groups. Such obligations could be funded on an equitable basis through a levy on all or parts of industry and/or through funding from public sources.*

48. It is too early to lay down a specific blueprint for the future funding and provision of information society services. However, urgent consideration is needed as to how this could be accomplished in the context of achieving universal availability and access, including an examination of a range of funding measures both public and private.

49. People need to be aware of the potential uses of the technologies given that they present new and untried opportunities for the majority. It is difficult for people to know their needs unless they know the possibilities on offer.

Recommendation

> *The IFJ recommends to the World Summit to support programmes at national and regional level to investigate the provision of affordable access to information society services, to examine ways of identifying new opportunities for the use of such services*

and to consider funding measures that are necessary to create greater participation of people at all levels in society and from all regions in the information society.