Association for Progressive Communications
Women's Networking Support Programme
http://www.apcwomen.org
(ECOSOC I CONSULTATIVE STATUS)

COMMENTS ON WSIS DOCUMENTS DATED 21 MARCH 2003

CONTACT
Karen Banks - karenb@apcwomen.org
APC WSIS and Women's Networking Support Programme Coordinator
c/- 2nd Floor, 33 Islington High Street, London, N1 9LH, UK
+ 442077131941 Tel
+ 442078375551 Fax

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1. Introduction

The Association For Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC-WNSP) is a network of over 80 women from 30 countries who support women networking for social change and gender justice, through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Our approach in gender and ICT work involves an understanding of power relations in society. This recognition includes an awareness of the unequal power relations between women and men, north and south, rich and poor, urban and rural, connected and unconnected - in local communities, in sovereign countries, and globally.

WNSP works to transform these relations of inequality, with the full knowledge that ICTs can be used to either exacerbate or transform unequal power relations. Part of this recognition includes an awareness of the limits of ICTs - that in and of themselves, ICTs cannot create gender equality, or end poverty, but that they can be tools for social action and positive social change.

We are am initiating member of the WSIS NGO Gender Strategies working group and a member of the WSIS Gender Caucus, a partner of the GKP, the CRIS campaign and enjoys ECOSOC I Consultative Status with the United Nations.

With respect contributions for the WSIS Intersessional, we acknowledge and affirm the contributions of the APC, the Human Rights Caucus, the Communication Rights Caucus, the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group members and the WSIS Gender Caucus.

APC WNSP recognises and appreciates the efforts of the drafting committee to include the concerns and interest of the many governments, private sector and civil society stakeholders that have participated in this process.

2. Comments on the Draft declaration of Principles: Document WSIS/PCIP/DT/1-E

General Comments

We are concerned that, despite the work of many gender and ICT advocates from all stake-holders during the WSIS process, scant reference is made to several critical gender and ICT issues. Though we welcome the inclusion of references to the needs of women in redrafts, our concerns, clearly outlined in the letter of the NGO Gender Strategies working group from PrepCom II, still largely remain in relation to these documents:

> "Most references to women are couched in the frame of "women and youth." We are not inclined to focus on the number of times when women are mentioned but rather on when and how they are mentioned. We are seriously concerned about the conceptual inadequacy of the framework that mechanistically links together 'women and youth as if to suggest that the situation of these two constituencies are fundamentally similar and should be approached in the same way.

> A strong, fully informed gender perspective, on the other hand, would encompass the diversity and specificity of concerns of different categories of women both in the North and in the South. To this end, we urge that gender equality should be specifically identified both as a Key Principle in the document, and as a cross-cutting issue in relation to each of the Action Lines proposed within it[1].

Other issues (such as those outlined in a document developed by the NGO GSWG) are also still largely absent, and we urge all stakeholders to support the addition of the following in it's envisioning section:

- An intersectional approach
- Building on Global Consensus
- People-centred development.
- Respect for Diversity

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[1] Extract from Open letter to Mr. Adama Samassekou http://www.genderit.org/wsis/Open-Letter-En.doc

- Peace and Human Development
- Human Rights Framework
- Supporting local solutions

The full document is attached as Appendix 1 and available here:
http://www.genderit.org/CSW/musthaves.htm

In addition, we echo the concerns outlined by the APC in it's separate submission and note that all of these issues are gender issues, and call again for a principle of gender-mainstreaming to be adopted throughout all aspects of the WSIS Declaration and Action Plan.

- The document does not explicitly confront the fact that fundamental political, social and economic inequalities shape our world. Nor does the document adequately recognise the centrality of gender inequality to broader social inequality.

- Increased access to knowledge, without greater access to power and decision-making and the equitable redistribution of available resources, is unlikely to result in reducing the gap between the powerful and the powerless.

- We are very concerned about the sections on 'Building Confidence and Security in the use of ICTs', an increasingly important and controversial issue. The wording in the text is not based on sufficient discussion with relevant stakeholders, and demonstrates a lack of awareness of current debates in this area.

  This area covers a broad range of intersecting issues and rights including: technical reliability and security, communications data retention, export of data beyond national boundaries, surveillance, communications interception, citizen identification requirements, information sharing and data matching, data mining, direct marketing, health information systems, financial systems, employee monitoring, law enforcement use of data, judicial oversight, governance and accountability, "cybercrime" issues, freedom of information issues', definition of 'harmful and illegal' content, consumer rights and confidence – to name only some.

  Many existing rights, including privacy and data protection, have come under unprecedented stress throughout the world in the course of policy development and legislation in this area. Development of policies and actions in this area requires a high degree of understanding, sensitivity and wisdom and must reflect the concerns that citizens' rightly have about the fragile future of these fundamental rights[2].

- There is insufficient reference to impacts on the environment in the information society resulting from new technologies and infrastructure. This is a crucial oversight. There is one reference to environmental protection in the Action Plan, but none in the Declaration of principles.

- While Intellectual Property Rights are mentioned, the document does not sufficiently acknowledge the impact of IPR on access to information and knowledge, nor on technological innovation.

- The declaration of principles would benefit from being synthesised into a more concise document without so much repetition.

B. We declare our Common Vision of the Information Society:

Paragraph 9:

We affirm the need to focus on application of ICTs in alleviating poverty and hunger, and ask all stakeholders to affirm and support commitments made by governments in the Beijing Platform for Action:

> Eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social

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[2] Please refer to the Privacy International open letter to members of the European Parliament, 30th May 2003)
http://www.privacyinternational.org/intl_orgs/eu/delgado-letter-503.html

development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centered sustainable development (art. 16, Beijing declaration, BPFA)

Paragraph 10:

We want to particularly endorse the reference to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paragraph 10 but feel, like the Human Rights Caucus, that it is not sufficient to assert that "the essential requirements for the development of an equitable Information Society" should be "in accordance" with Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Instead, the document should declare once and for all that Article 19 must be enforced.

In addition, as many have pointed out, the principles of a better balanced flow of information, press freedom, participation in the communication process, and knowledge sharing will become truly meaningful only when they are viewed as being supported by a complex of rights, not just Article 19.

To this end, we support the submission of the Human Rights Caucus which articulates a WSIS Rights framework thus:

- Need for a consistent articulation of rights
- Recognition of information and communications as public common goods
- Democratic governance and human rights enforcement
- Relevant rights from the UN International CCPR and CESCR

C. An information Society for all: key principles

Human rights and freedoms, of which women's human rights and freedom of expression are an integral part, must be at the core of the information society.

The information society should be based on principles of gender equity, human dignity and gender justice, and should be geared towards the eradication of gender disparities in education and training, socio-economic status, civic and political decision-making.

Additional paragraph:
In recognising the centrality of gender equality to social, political and economic equity:

We call for the enforcement of Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention of the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, which substantively promotes the principles of equality and equality of results, and the principle of non-discrimination[3].

Paragraph 14: We affirm paragraph 14 with respect the importance of empowerment and inclusion, but note with concern that women – at the deepest end of the 'digital divide' are not explicitly referred.
We call for all stakeholders to affirm and support commitments made by governments in the Beijing Platform for Action in this respect:

Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis or equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace (art. 13, Beijing declaration, BPFA)

Paragraph 15. We would like to suggest, as proposed by the Gender Caucus, that the first sentence of this paragraph be altered to include the phrase 'access to and control over resources' so that it reads:

"Unequal power relations and other social and cultural aspects have contributed to differential access, participation, control over and access to resources and status for men and women".

Paragraph 17. The pursuit of universal and equitable access to the information society must be underpinned by an understanding of the gender digital divide and of the rural-urban divide.

Paragraph 20. We propose that all such initiatives are gender aware and include a focus on impacts on men and women.

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[3] http://www.iwraw-ap.org/SubstantiveEquality.html

Paragraphs 36-37

We are very concerned with the paragraphs relating to 'Building Confidence and Security in ICTs' this sections in both the Declaration and Action Plan.

The paragraphs overstate the security of governments and neglect the rights of individuals and organisations who make use of electronic communication networks.

The first step in building confidence of all stakeholders, is to provide space for comprehensive discourse on the intersection of information security issues, civil liberties and human rights, leading to informed decisions and a more legitimate process.

Some of the current debate and discourse in the public domain on these issues has led to the development of useful guidelines which could be reviewed by WSIS stakeholders (such as the OECD guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks)[4].

Unfortunately, there are proposals to adopt other conventions (such as the CyberCrime Treaty) or create new ones emulating them, which directly contravene or remove, existing rights and protections.

In addition, the entire drafting process was conducted in a non-transparent manner, with little or no access given to the stakeholders who will be affected.

Much of the focus in the text is on 'technical reliability, security, and robustness'; yet, Internet security can be most effectively achieved by the use of free and open source software - free source code that can be publicly modified and redistributed.

Civil Society has been, in the large, absent, or denied access to current discussions in this area. The WSIS could redress this situation by providing space for more discussion with all stakeholders.

All of these issues affect women, as they do men, and we call on all WSIS stakeholders to ensure women's access to all aspects of decision-making in this area.

We would propose, rather than editing existing language, that a multi-stakeholder group be formed, tasked with developing a new value and principle framework, based on the previous work of all stakeholders, so that a cohesive and legitimate framework underpins the Action Plan. We are more than willing to contribute to that work.

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[4] http://www.oecd.org/pdf/M00033000/M00033182.pdf

Comments on the Draft action plan: Document WSIS/PCIP/DT/2-E

General comments

APC-WNSP wants to express its concern that the most important element of any such document, benchmarks and targets, is limited to one section (B. Objectives, paragraph 45) and only 12 points.

Moreover, these points (paragraph 45), containing the only specific commitments to action in the entire Action Plan, seem to be have been compiled in rather an ad hoc fashion, and do not seem to be in the context of the many important issues identified throughout the rest of the document.

We would like the document to also affirm and support decisions made in previous UN conferences, as noted in our comments on the declaration of principles above.

Without specific and meaningful targets; a monitoring and evaluation framework; a means for redress when commitments are not met; and allocation of adequate resources, we are doubtful that this Action Plan will lead to any significant actions. We do however note Section E on follow up, and have added some additional comments to that section.

To reiterate our comments in the Declaration section:

We urge that gender equality should be specifically identified both as a Key Principle in the document, and as a cross-cutting issue in relation to each of the Action Lines proposed within it[5].

1. **Information and communication infrastructure: financing and investment, affordability, development and sustainability**

Develop and implement gender planning and budgeting guidelines for the allocation of public and public-private partnership resources with respect investment in ICT infrastructure, projects and programmes.

Develop low-cost technologies and non-text based computer interfaces using iconographic software and voice recognition to facilitate ICT access for poor, illiterate women.
Finance the development of open source technologies and open software that will facilitate women's access.

2. **Access to information and knowledge**

Design community access points that take account of gender differences in mobility, available time, income, literacy levels, and general socio-cultural factors.

Promote the use of ICT as an effective tool in distributing information about, and advocating against, gender-based violence.

Prepare and disseminate accessible information that strengthens prevention programmes that promotes women's health such as education and information on sexual and reproductive health issues and on sexually transmitted disease and HIV/AIDS.

Support projects that use ICTs themselves as tools to improve women's access, for example by providing web-based content on available software, basic skills and know-how, and links to gender resources.

4. **Capacity building: human resources development, education, and training**

Develop training and capacity building programmes to increase women's participation in content creation, decision-making and policy-making in the ICT sector.

Develop awareness-raising programmes to sensitise decision-makers and policy-makers to the gender aspects of the information society.

Develop early interventions programmes in science and technology that target young girls to increase the number of women in ICT careers

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[5] Extract from Open letter to Mr. Adama Samassekou http://www.genderit.org/wsis/Open-Letter-En.doc

Make maximum use of ICTs – for example, through distance education, elearning and other ICT-based delivery systems - to eliminate gender disparities in literacy, and in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Take positive steps to ensure equitable gender access to ICT facilities in both formal and informal education and training.

Develop teacher training courses on gender and ICTs to raise awareness of issues that influence different levels of ICT take-up among girls and boys.

Create computer and information literacy programmes that promote a critical approach to ICT use among girls and women.
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5. Security

All activities developed in this area should follow from outcomes of further discussions as noted in our comments on the Declaration (page 6 of this document).

If, for example, the WSIS was to support implementation of the OECD Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks', an action plan implementing those guidelines would naturally follow here.

However, in the absence of a cohesive value and principle framework, we see little value in articulating action points.

6. Enabling environment

ICT policy processes must integrate gender analysis at all stages of their development, from the initial design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This requires an analysis of the current status of women and men's participation in and use of ICT, including a comprehensive analysis of sex disaggregated statistics and indicators and policy responses that target gender-based differences and inequalities. In addition, the policy process itself needs to be inclusive and consultative through the participation of stakeholders groups representative of the full spectrum of society, including gender advocates

Allocate adequate resources for policy development to integrate gender equality in ICT policies including funds for research and analysis that demonstrates the impact of ICT policies on gender equality as well as the human resource capacity to ensure that gender analysis is fully integrated in the ICT policy policy process.

Strengthen national machineries for the advancement of women, particularly through increased financial resources and technical expertise that can facilitate their advocacy role and collaborative action amongst government bodies

Develop gender-sensitive technical and regulatory instruments when addressing ICT policy issues as universal access, regulatory frameworks, licensing, tariffing, spectrum allocation, infrastructure ICT industry development and labour policies.

7. Promotion of development-oriented ICT applications for all

Develop, promote and support gender sensitive educational programmes and appropriate learning environments including e-learning to increase women's access to education.
Implement measures to ensure women's equal access to ICT education, training and literacy by:
-   Integrating ICT education in school curricula that takes into account on gender equality and women's practical and strategic needs
-   Realizing girls' full participation in science and technology education
-   Developing relevant distance ICT education and training programmes, especially for rural women and girls;

Carry out pilot projects to investigate models of information presentation that respond to women's preferred learning styles, and develop appropriate ICT content packaging.

Governments and other actors, including trade unions, business and professional associations, and international organizations such as the ILO and UNCTAD, should:

- Develop ICT-based information systems with relevant content for women to increase their economic opportunities and entrepreneurship skills, including information about national economic and trade policies and programmes
- Use ICT to increase women's economic literacy and their economic empowerment and participation
- Ensure that women gain access to new employment opportunities in the ICT area, including by increasing women's access to ICT literacy and skills at all levels, and also ensure that women are not disproportionately disadvantaged by the working conditions and organizational climate common within the global ICT industry, such as "flexible" employment practices
- Ensure that women workers in the ICT sector are protected by International Labour standards and that programmes are developed contributing to improving their roles in the sector.

Promote critical debate and awareness-raising projects to combat the use of ICTs for the transmission of pornography, especially violent pornography, and for cybercrimes such as cyber-stalking and sex trafficking.

8. Cultural identity and linguistic diversity, local content and media development

Develop, consistent with freedom of expression, regulatory mechanisms that promote balanced and diverse portrayals of women by the media and international communication systems and that promote increased participation by women and men in production and decision making.

Include content about women and gender issues in all official Government websites in addition to those websites that specifically cover gender equality issues.

Design content on the basis of research into women's stated information needs, in local languages and accessible media formats.

Encourage innovative combinations of new technologies and traditional technologies that enhance women's opportunities to access information.

9. Identifying and overcoming barriers to the achievement of the Information Society with a human perspective

Develop, promote and implement research programmes that permit ongoing and comprehensive analysis of the impact of ICT on gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly by development of appropriate indicators, conceptual frameworks and qualitative assessment methodologies
Support and encourage research programs to design, develop and adapt ICT infrastructure, tools and application that are responsive to the needs of the poor, especially non-literate women
Commission a study on the interaction between gender equality and ICT, which should include development of conceptual tools, a baseline analysis of gender equality and ICT, design of appropriate indicators, and case studies on the impact of ICT on achieving gender equality, to inform the dialogue of the Summit.

B. Objectives

Benchmarks

Set targets for delegations in all future conference related to ICT to include at least 30 percent women, including gender and ICT advocates

Ensure the inclusion of gender as a category in all databases and observatories on ICTs and the information society.

Establish data collection systems that include sex-disaggregated data on all aspects of ICT use, and develop qualitative as well as quantitative gender-related performance indicators.

C. Strategies programmes, methods for implementation

Paragrpah 52. We would like to note the importance of incorporating gender analysis and planning in relation to paragraph 52, Performance monitoring

> "..strategies should include timeframes, indicators and mechanisms for monitoring performance based not only on quantitative but also qualitative criteria"

In addition:

53a. Apply gender analysis techniques, and ensure the participation of gender specialists, in the appraisal of existing policies and programmes and the development of new ones.

53b. Develop models and implement systems to increase the participation of women and gender equality experts in decision-making processes with a view to ensuring good governance and accountability to stakeholders.

53c. Carry out studies and disseminate information on the applications of ICTs for women's empowerment – for example in terms of employment and trade, agriculture, education, improved health, advocacy and networking, civic and political participation.

53d. Develop publicly accessible databases of best practice in the use of ICTs for women's empowerment and the pursuit of gender equality.

E. Follow up

The regional conferences, and associated events, leading up the Summit will enable assessment, dialogue and debate, and the development of strategies and measures appropriate to individual regional contexts.

The Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action to be adopted at the Summit itself should reflect these regional proposals, in a concerted international effort to work towards an information society in which the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is unequivocally articulated as a goal. The following measures would contribute to that goal:

- Develop reporting mechanisms to monitor progress towards gender equality in the ICT area
- Provide resources for civil society organisations, including women's organisations to enhance grassroots participation in the ICT policy processes.
- Include the pursuit of gender equality as a goal within analyses, assessments, discussions, conferences and other preparatory events for the Summit.
- Consult with national machineries for women, with women's NGOs and with the gender focal points within the UN system in drawing up proposals for inclusion in the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action to be adopted at the Summit.
- Take positive steps to ensure the participation of women, including those with expertise in gender and ICTs, in all delegations to regional pre-conferences, Preparatory Committees and the Summit itself.

END

Appendices follow

Appendix 1: The "Seven Musts": Priority Issues for Gender Equality in the WSIS Process

prepared by the Civil Society NGO Gender Strategies Working group[6]

An Intersectional Approach: Gender mainstreaming in the WSIS needs a nuanced approached that takes account of the diverse needs of women located in different geo-political, historical, class-based, racial, ethnic and other contexts.

Building on Global Concensus: The WSIS needs to place as its core mission the need to address the socio-economic and political inequities globally, through consensus building. WSIS negotiations and agreements need to reaffirm commitments made at previous UN conferences and summits in particular the World Conferences on Women in Nairobi and Beijing, as well as those focussed on the rights of the child, on environment and development, human rights, population and social development.

People-Centred Development: Development should embrace the principles of social justice and gender equality for it be considered to be addressing the needs of women and to start a process of redressing fundamental economic and socio-cultural gaps.

Respect for Diversity: The singular focus in the WSIS process on digital technologies excludes the recognition of the role and importance of traditional and indigenous forms of media and communications. The WSIS process needs to respect the diversity of needs and to reflect that in the diversity of solutions and strategies.

Peace and Human Development: Peace and security questions are absent from the current WSIS framework and premises, and neglects the potential role of the Information Society in advancing an environment that promotes world peace, the promotion of human rights and democracy. There is urgent need to harness the use of ICTs in the service of peace and in opposition of wars.

Human Rights Framework: Women's human rights instruments together with fundamental communication rights – such as freedom of expression, the right to information, and the right to communicate – must be reiterated in the final outcomes of the WSIS processes and summits. Concerns regarding "information security" and the trafficking of women and girls, violent adult pornography and pedophilia must not be used to for centralist control of all other content development on the Web.

Supporting Local Solutions: The current framework for ICT infrastructure development is too reliant on "creating stimulating regulatory environments and fiscal incentives" to encourage investments from corporations in the North into countries in the South. There is urgent need to also encourage local low-cost and open source solutions as well as South-South exchanges, to encourage local content producers through public funding to support the prevention of "content dumping" from large entertainment corporations in the North to the rest of the world.

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[6] http://www.genderit.org/about.htm

Appendix 2: ACTION ITEMS for Gender Equality in the Information Society

prepared by the Civil Society NGO Gender Strategies Working group[7]

Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) have become a powerful and widespread tool for social development. An equitable Information Society needs to be based on sustainable economic and social development and gender justice. It cannot be achieved solely through market forces.
The existing human rights framework should be applied and integrated into the Information Society. ICTs, including traditional media, should be used to promote awareness of, respect for and enforcement of women's rights and gender equality.

Access to ICT Access to affordable ICT and the power to decide how to use technology contributes to women's economic and social empowerment and facilitates their full participation in shaping political, economic and social development.

ICT Training Develop capacity building programs on the strategic use of ICT by women, particularly in marginalized communities, to utilize ICT for their own economic and social empowerment as well as develop content, produce and disseminate information.

Women's Economic Empowerment Ensure that women gain equal access to new employment opportunities and in decision making positions in the ICT and media sectors, by increasing women's access to ICT literacy and skills.

Women's Social Empowerment Ensure that access to ICT tools and facilities enable lifelong learning for girls and women. Promote early intervention programs in science and technology that target young girls and increase the number of women in ICT careers. Promote the use of ICT as an effective tool in distributing information and advocating for gender equality. Prepare and disseminate accessible information that strengthens prevention programs that promote women's health.

Content Development Recognize cultural development as a living and evolving process, and foster linguistic diversity, cultural identity and local content. Access of women to expression through the media and ICT is crucial to ensure this process.

E-government Facilitate and promote the participation of women in public decision-making processes through the use of ICT.

Create an enabling policy environment ICT and media policy processes must integrate gender analysis at all stages of their development, from the initial design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The policy process itself needs to be inclusive and consultative through the participation of stakeholders groups representative of the full spectrum of society, including gender, media and ICT advocates. Ensure adequate financial resources for policy implementation.

Research, Monitor and Evaluate ICT for Development Promote the analysis of the current status of women and men's participation in and use of ICT, including a comprehensive analysis of sex disaggregated statistics and indicators and policy responses that target gender-based differences and inequalities.

Representation and Portrayal in the Media Create a media environment that promotes gender equality by fostering positive images of women and women's views and ensures freedom of expression.

Participation in National Delegations Set targets for delegations in all future conferences related to ICT to include at least 30 percent women, including gender and ICT advocates

Reaffirm Previous UN Commitments Reaffirm and commit (to build) on consensus and progress made at previous United Nations conferences and summits: on women in Nairobi in 1985, on children in New York in 1990, on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, on human rights in Vienna in 1993, on population and development in Cairo in 1994 and on social development in Copenhagen in 1995 with the objective of achieving equality, development and peace; (Article 10, Beijing Declaration, BPFA)

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[7] http://www.genderit.org/about.htm

APPENDIX 3: Open Letter to Mr. Adama Sammassekou

25th February 2003

Mr. Adama Samassekou
The President, WSIS Preparatory Committee
Geneva

Dear Sir,

We, the undersigned, are writing to you as a group of non-governmental organizations and activists from different regions committed to participating in the preparatory process for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) which will take place in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2003.

We see the WSIS as a conference that is being convened at a unique juncture in human development. It comes in the wake of a series of international development conferences held over the past decade that have brought together government around the world in a process of consensus building focused on the principles, values, decision-making and governance frameworks that should underpin different aspects of human society. We are cogniscant of the context in which the WSIS is taking place. It is one characterised by a heightened push for systems of global governance, global accountability, and a fundamental commitment of all governments to address social injustice, inequality in the face of growing disparities between the rich and poor, and heightened desolation and fear among many populations resulting from long-drawn violence and civil strife.

As NGO activists with a strong commitment to social justice, gender equality and human rights, who have lobbied actively for government commitments on these matters in conferences in the past decades, we welcome now the opportunity to participate in the process of the WSIS.

As a UN conference that has linked its objectives to meeting the Millenium Development Goals, we believe that the WSIS should be "…working towards a world in which sustaining development and eradication of poverty would have the highest priority". But in recent months, we have grown increasingly concerned with the directions taken by the preparatory process for WSIS and in particular with what has been presented to us as the "Proposal of an Orientation Document for PrepCom-2," also referred to as a Non-Paper. We write to share with you our concerns regarding the content and form of this Non-Paper, urging you to take strong leadership to restore a focus on human development objectives within the WSIS process. We believe that there is an urgent need to prioritise the needs of the most marginalised amongst us, and to analyse fully the realities of countries in the South, thus paving the way for a Summit that will have outcomes that are meaningful for the least privileged.

Here are some of our concerns with regard to the orientation, content and form of the Non-Paper:

1. While we fully recognise the quantum leap expansion that has taken place in the information and communications sector as a result of corporate capital investments from both private and public institutions, we are deeply concerned by the document's heavy reliance on market-based solutions for almost all developmental issues related to ICTs. There appears to be a strong centre-staging of market-based approaches and an assumption that growth, efficiency and profit-maximising should the guiding principles of development.

Examples of this, though it exists in many different forms throughout the document can be seen in Action Line, No. 5 on Enabling Environment and No. 6 on Building Partnership and Mobilising Resources for the Information Society, which refer to including ICTs inside Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) packages, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) agreements of the World Bank. We have good reason to fear that promoting an information society in ways that are linked to currently inequitable aid packages to the South will lead to entrenched indebtedness, rather than lead to sustainable human development. It would not be far-fetched to imagine a diversion of aid from much needed social development

allotments that will ultimately impact the world's poorest and most marginalised, including poor women of the South.

2. The WSIS is held under the auspices of the United Nations and given the mandate of this international body, which is the site of consensus building amongst governments. We applaud the attempts of the WSIS Secretariat to define the roles and relationships of the various stakeholders in this process, and where possible to strengthen partnerships amongst them. However, the 'division of labour and specialized responsibilities' that are outlined for the various stakeholders seems to us to be expressed in over-simplistic terms for instance, Point 3 of the Annex of "Examples of Possible Concrete and Comprehensive Actions' describes governments' role as being to " create stimulating regulatory environment and fiscal incentives", the role of business sector as being to "bring in technology and make available simple applications," while the role of non-governmental organisations be to "undertake awareness campaigns and work at the community level." Such a division of labour simplifies the many very complex relationships that exist between the different stakeholders. These relationships must be recognized and acknowledged if there are to be any common platforms upon which those concerned can act together in using ICTs for human development. For instance, it is crucial to acknowledge that the various stakeholders in this process do not have the same advantages in the global context and therefore will not have receive the same benefits, or pursue the same interests in relation to the outcomes of the WSIS.

3. There is no mention of gender equality in any part of the document, while all references to women are always couched in the frame of "women and youth." We are not inclined to focus on the number of times when women are mentioned but rather on when and how they are mentioned. We are seriously concerned about the conceptual inadequacy of the framework that mechanistically links together 'women and youth as if to suggest that the situation of these two constituencies are fundamentally similar and should be approached in the same way. A strong, fully informed gender perspective, on the other hand, would encompass the diversity and specificity of concerns of different categories of women both in the North and in the South. To this end, we urge that gender equality should be specifically identified both as a Key Principle in the document, and as a cross-cutting issue in relation to each of the Action Lines proposed within it.

4. The document is very heavily focused on digital technology, making little mention of the more traditional ICTs. We urge you to recognise the need for a variety of information and communication media to meet the needs of those who either cannot attain digital versatility for a long time to come, or for whom digitally enabled communications is not a desired form. We need to recognise that given the diversity of cultures and societies that exist globally and that embody a vast range of communications styles, needs and purposes, prescribing or pursuing only one solution, i.e. the digital solution, is anti-thetical to the expansion of human opportunities and to the notion of democracy overall. The Annex of the Non-Paper has a listing of benchmark indicators, all of which refer to digitally enabled technologies. There is no mention of enhancing other communication media such as community-based radio broadcasting, print and other media.

5. In Action Lines, Point 2 of the Non-Paper, there is a reference to "working with the media to popularise the use of ICTs". We feel that separating out media from ICTs is conceptually flawed, even if this is a common practice when speaking about old and new forms of ICTs. We need to recognise all information and communication tools that are used for the purposes of information sharing, news delivery, public broadcasting, knowledge transfer, entertainment and so forth.

6. We are seriously concerned about the way in which information security is described in Action Line 7 of the document. While we recognise the new challenges that emerge around security concerns with the advent of new information and communications technologies, we believe that any attempt to legislate around these concerns, such as "the elaboration of an international convention on information and communication network security" must not be at the expense of existing human rights and civil liberties frameworks. In any deliberations of information security, the legal principles of necessity, specificity, and proportionality must be upheld at all costs.

7. Given that the WSIS is being held within the framework of the United Nations where governments have ratified a range of treaties, declarations and action plans, grounded in the firm principle of the universality, non divisibility of human rights we are concerned with how fundamental freedoms are being described/implied in the Non-Paper. While we recognise that this is a conference whose main agenda is information and communications, we need to ensure that at the level of principles that there will be an upholding of ALL fundamental human rights. This would ensure that the development of ICTs would be in line with other social development goals that have been stated in previous UN conferences.

In light of the concerns raised in this letter, we strongly urge the ITU WSIS Secretariat to ensure that the social dimensions of development are emphasised. While we recognise that sustainable and equitable economic development is a crucial element in the overall effort to bridge social divides, we believe that many of the more entrenched socio-political injustices cannot be redressed through economic or market-based solutions. In many cases, social inequality and marginalisation have historical and geo-political roots that need a high level of political will to reexamine basic assumptions upon which our societies are founded. We believe that using traditional and new ICTs as enabling tools towards ensuring that all members of society benefit from economic growth based on a holistic approach to all aspects of development: growth, equality between women and men, social justice, conservation and protection of the environment, sustainability, solidarity, participation, peace and respect for human rights.

We thank once again for your leadership in beginning the process of our discussions with the introduction of the Non-Paper. We look to the ITU WSIS Secretariat to provide leadership and guidance to State parties in ensuring that all negotiations and agreements made at the WSIS are based on a reaffirmation to furthering commitments made at previous United Nations conferences and summits.

We would be available, if you are interested, to meet with you and discuss these issues further.
Yours sincerely

Association of Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP)
African Women's Development and Communication Network (FemNET)
Isis International – Manila
International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC)
Margaret Gallagher, Media and Gender
Sally Burch, ALAI, Ecuador
William J. McIver, Jr., University at Albany, State University of New York, USA
World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, Africa (AMARC Africa)

Amali De Silva, Director, Vancouver Community Network, Canada.
Lisa McLaughlin, Union for Democratic Communications
Sean O'Siochro, CRIS Campaign Strategy Group
Marie-Helene Mottin Sylla, L'organisation internationale enda tiers-monde, Dakar, Senegal