

Communication rights

Civil Society contribution – 17 July 2003 Plenary session

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) makes it very clear that freedom of expression is the basis for individual and societal development.

We suggest to introduce the concept of *communication rights* that can be used as a generic term and reference point to already existing rights which are enshrined in international declarations and conventions.

All of these rights need constructively to be interpreted and enforced taking into account the potentials and opportunities of contemporary information and communication technologies and services. The claim for communication rights cannot and will not replace existing rights but will focus the public attention to a *dramatic change in our way to seek, produce and exchange knowledge*.

Knowledge production and exchange is a *participative and collaborative process* and is no longer dependent on mainly hierarchically structured and controlled institutions but is open for everyone. Everyone has the opportunity to participate actively and unrestrictedly in these processes of producing and exchanging knowledge. What counts in open communicative networks is not status and positions in hierarchies but *competence and the willingness to share knowledge*.

Communication rights do not challenge press freedom but *make possible new platforms for real community-based and people-centered communication devices* such as communication forums and other forms of electronic communication.

- Societies with open communication structures for everyone *can challenge media concentration* and media monopolies.
- Communication rights can enable access to information by those who often face exclusion from knowledge and information
- Communication rights if guaranteed for everyone can contribute to censorship-free societies
- Communication rights and collaborative knowledge production are the basis for scientific development, new ideas and for economic innovation and growth.

The World Summit for the Information Society can be a platform for starting a discussion about implementing specific communication rights and their consequences for information societies. We propose in December to hold a one day multistakeholder forum on communication rights to further this debate.

We urge government delegates to retain reference to the international bill of human rights as a whole and in particular to those rights, which we firmly believe should be called communication rights that are of immediate and direct concern to the development of inclusive information and knowledge societies.