

BACK TO BASICS: WSIS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Human Rights in the Information Society (HRIS) Caucus

Address to the Inter-sessional meeting,

July 16, 2003, Paris, France

Exactly 10 years ago, in Vienna at the World Conference on Human Rights, over 170 governments reaffirmed their commitment to human rights. As governments, you collectively stated that **human rights were universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent**. You agreed that their protection was the **first responsibility** of governments. Today, as we debate the challenges of the information and communication society, let us not forget what has already been agreed upon.

Human rights are not a sectoral issue, relevant to only certain stakeholders. Human rights are one of the essential purposes of the United Nations, according to its Charter. The advent of information and communication technologies offers both opportunities and threats for those rights. If this Summit fails to reaffirm the *centrality* of human rights to its deliberations, we will have not only missed an opportunity, we will have sacrificed the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that we all hold dear.

The Human Rights Caucus welcomes the references to human rights in the draft Declaration of Principles. However, **human rights should figure prominently throughout both the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action and WSIS should concentrate its efforts on devising concrete strategies to see that the rights recognized in international law are effectively implemented.**

We support the reference to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paragraph 10 of the Draft Declaration of Principles. This article must not only be affirmed, but also enforced. **As we sit here in Paris, countless individuals in various parts of the world are detained simply for exercising, often using ICTs, their basic democratic rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association.**

Privacy, a human right enshrined in international law, encounters specific challenges with the introduction of ICTs. Its protection will require strong language in Paragraph 52 of the Declaration of Principles and Chapters 5 and 6 of the Plan of Action. **Privacy is not an ethical or moral issue; it is a fundamental human right.**

In the name of a war against terrorism and with the pretension of increasing our security, human rights are being violated: right to a fair trial, presumption of innocence, equality before the law, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of movement and freedom from all forms of discrimination.

We don't need a culture of security, we need to ensure the security of cultures. That means that everyone, without discrimination, must be able to freely exercise their cultural rights and to use their own languages. ICTs will facilitate the realization of the right to education and knowledge only if fair and equitable access is within reach. That is the essence of a right to communicate.

“Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized”. **That is the promise of Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The World Summit on the Information Society must not betray it.**