

Intervention on behalf of the Civil Society Disability Caucus to the PrepCom2 of WSIS II delivered on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2005 at Room XIX, Palais de Nations.

Re: Revised Chapter 2 of the Operational Part; WSIS-II/PC-2/DOC/3-E Add.1(Rev.1)

Thank you Madam Chairperson,

People with disabilities are poorest among the poors in particular in developing countries. Affordable ICTs need to be accessible and usable for individuals with disabilities to guarantee full participation in the community as active partners. So far, ICTs in many cases created new man-made barriers for persons with disabilities in developing countries in terms of affordability, accessibility and usability.

For example, a screen reading software for blind people prices US1,000 per license in addition to the standard computer equipment, an intelligent keyboard for persons with cognitive/intellectual disabilities costs more than US1,000 per unit even though assistive technology manufacturers are strongly encouraged to reduce the cost.

Promotion of low cost assistive technologies and accessibility standard development for mainstream ICTs are keys to realize the “digital opportunities” for persons with disabilities. Inclusive and universal access to ICTs requires development of assistive technologies and universal design as stipulated in the Geneva Declaration of Principles.

Therefore I would like to urge governments, international organizations and business sectors to promote existing accessibility standards, such as W3C Web Accessibility Guidelines for example, and to encourage development of accessibility standards for persons with disabilities.

Effective financial mechanisms to promote accessibility standards of national as well as international level will include following 3 suggestions:

1. Duty/Tax free requirements for the use of ICTs by persons with disabilities
2. Requirements for application of government or international donor’s grant
3. Requirements for procurement

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to ongoing recovery process of Tsunami Disasters and preparedness issues from disability view point.

Tsunami killed more than 300,000 people including those who could not hear, could not see, could not evacuate, and who could not react to save their lives. Those survivors are still struggling against physical as well as mental injuries including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The rescue and recovery activities need to have a seamless transition to reconstruction stage with clear vision of safe and inclusive society to prevent another disasters to come. Early warning system should provide timely information in accessible format to everybody. Preparedness including knowledge, training and support for evacuation for persons with special needs need to be developed immediately. Inclusion of persons with disabilities in the disaster preparedness development is, in fact, the most effective and economical way to guarantee a safe community for everybody including foreign travelers. Because people with disabilities may act as role models of a person in extreme conditions such as Tsunami, earth quake, thunderstorm or blackout of the subway.

Based on this fact, I would like to propose a special financing mechanisms to be established for disaster recovery and preparedness development that is inclusive of persons with disabilities.

Thank you very much Madam Chairperson for your attention.

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