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English only

CPSR on behalf of Canadian Civil Society

Canadian Civil Society Communiqué

Preamble

This consensus statement was adopted by Canadian civil society groups representing a diverse range of peoples, backgrounds, expertise, and perspectives. The group of 200 people met in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, on 13-15 May 2005 at a conference entitled "Paving the Road to Tunis" organized by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO with the support of Foreign Affairs Canada, Industry Canada, Canadian Heritage, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, the International Development Research Centre, and the Canada Council for the Arts. The purpose of the meeting was to canvass the views of the civil society organizations in Canada on the Plan of Action that emerged from Phase I of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva and the prospects for Phase II in Tunis.

Civil society represented at this conference affirmed Canadian values of human rights, freedom of expression, diversity, gender equality, sustainable development, multiculturalism, cultural and linguistic diversity, privacy, and inclusion regardless of age, ability, socioeconomic status and geographical location.

Participation, consultation and partnerships in action are fundamental to the creation of an information society that serves democratic development. We firmly maintain that democracy is reliant on an informed citizenry and civil society that has access to the data, information, knowledge and technology necessary to keep governments accountable.

Human Rights, Freedom of Expression and Diversity

Participants underlined the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which outlines the rights of every individual, and, in particular, Article 19: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

A first and essential step towards building an information society that enhances human development would be to put an end to the widespread violation of free expression that now occurs in so many nation states. Nothing in the action plan for building a just information society shall impair, restrict, or contradict this right.

We believe this principle must be applied to the WSIS process itself, including the conduct of the second phase of the WSIS Summit. Governments should not harass, threaten, or imprison individuals who exercise their fundamental right to freedom of expression. Individuals and organizations that defend human rights should have access to Summit activities, the right to speak, and unfettered access to the Internet.

Laws and practices that restrict freedom of expression have been denounced in several reports produced by, among others, organizations such as IFEX, Rights and Democracy, the International Federation of Human Rights, Reporters without Borders and OMCT (Organisation mondiale contre la torture). Participants recalled the importance of both the recommendations contained in these reports, and their implementation.

Diversity is a fundamental principle in the U.N. family of nations and should guide the implementation of the WSIS plan of action and the conduct of the Summit itself.

Affordability and Accessibility

The Canadian government should be a global leader in the promotion of ICTs as a public good to be delivered in a universal and affordable fashion. The Canadian government whether through enabling the market, regulation, direct intervention or by other means, should ensure that access is sufficient for effective use --coming to be understood as broadband access-- in the range of cultural, social, governance and economically beneficial ICT applications. Canadians whatever their economic or social circumstance and including those in remote and rural areas should have this access.

In this way all, including those in rural and remote areas, living on modest family incomes, recent immigrants, and marginalized populations, will be assured the sharing in the benefits and opportunities which ICT-enabled enhancements and transformations in services, productivity, and dispersed production opportunities, present in Canadian and global economies. Old and new media, including community radio and community based ICTs, are understood as having an important role to play in allowing an inclusive information society in Canada.

The Canadian government through its policies, programs and the working principles of its bodies and agencies, should provide example of no-cost, open and usable access to data, information and knowledge, created through the use of public resources. This should include providing access to primary data, to knowledge repositories, and to archives and other sources, at no cost and providing the means to ensure effective and widely available use of these resources.

Gender Equality

Implementation of ICT for development needs to be guided by a clearly articulated commitment to gender equality and the goal of building women's capacity to benefit from ICTs. This includes:

1. Appropriate technologies that account for the roles of women and their interests using both old and new technologies and appropriate software and applications;
2. The use of ICTs as a catalyst for better governance to give women a stronger voice in democratic processes in society;
3. Providing women and girls with the skills to protect themselves from ICT-facilitated harassment and exploitation;
4. Support for increased representation of women and girls in scientific and technical education, and the use of ICTs to promote their increased participation in education at all levels;
5. Promoting increased employment in the IT sector for women and the use of ICTs for their enterprises.

Persons with Disabilities

Canadians with disabilities account for 17% of the population and, despite efforts and progress made,

they continue to represent the most excluded of Canada's marginalized populations, with poor access to education, employment, and the means to realize their full potential. Women with disabilities and persons with disabilities from cultural or aboriginal communities are faced with double exclusion. Actions to take include:

1. Promoting the adoption and implementation of inclusive standards and alternative formats for ICTs;
2. Ensuring that all legislations, policies, programs, and initiatives in the field of ICTs from the initial phase of development include persons with disabilities;
3. Supporting capacity building of persons with disabilities to ensure that they can take full advantage of ICTs.

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples have the right to be part of the Information Society on their own terms and to shape their future without risking loss of their cultural identity. The survival and development of the living cultures of Indigenous Peoples should be supported by ICT use, not replaced by it. The traditional and cultural knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, held individually and collectively, is integrally linked with the exercise of their right to maintain and strengthen their spiritual and material relationships with ancestral territories. We support a culturally appropriate approach to ICT use in compliance with cultural protocols and customary laws of Indigenous Peoples.

We object to the commodification of Indigenous traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, in particular any characterization of them as raw material, a commercial resource, or the inclusion of such knowledge in the public domain without the consent and full participation of the individual and collective holders of such knowledge.

We recognize the challenges and obstacles faced by Indigenous Peoples with respect to ICTs, specifically the existing digital divide and its causes. We support the Indigenous right of access, and promote Indigenous participation as partners in action and stakeholders.

Actions to be taken:

1. Creating a high-level mechanism that brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors of the Information Society to promote its cultural diversity, co-operate in its evolution, develop an ethical code and standards for best practices and jointly monitor its impacts;
2. Enabling the realization of Indigenous research projects to support aboriginal communities by bridging the digital divide on their own terms and by developing culturally appropriate ICT applications, content and capacity-building programs;
3. Establishing special grant programs addressing the particular needs of Indigenous Peoples enabling "Indigenous-to-Indigenous" co-operation.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Ninety percent of Internet content is in 12 major languages; over 5,000 languages are not represented. Language barriers to information access should be addressed through the development of software applications and multi-cultural and multi-lingual content. This involves the production of local content by groups to build their own knowledge base, and encouraging racial, cultural and gender diversity of content.

Canada's cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity are the product of its physical size, geographical

diversity, Indigenous heritage, and colonial history. In Canada, there is a pressing need to foster multilingual and multicultural content with the full participation, consultation, and partnership in action of all cultural and linguistic groups.

Privacy

Privacy as a right is a prerequisite for participation in the Information Society. Governments should address privacy and security jointly and transparently, in cooperation with all stakeholders. Invasions of privacy must be prevented, and where privacy is outweighed by other societal claims there must be clear rules, subject to independent judicial oversight, setting forth the conditions under which it can be violated.

Many countries are expanding mandatory identification of individuals. Often, the rationale for these schemes are poorly founded, are unlikely to achieve their claimed objectives, and pose significant threats to privacy, freedom of expression and other civil liberties. Governments must ensure adequate prior public scrutiny and debate of these proposals.

Access to Knowledge

The Information Society should foster an environment of transparency and access among all levels of government, civil society and the public, including access to raw and geospatial framework data. It should ensure the preservation and fair, equitable, and culturally appropriate use of current and historical archival records and data, museum artefacts, public domain information, and printed and non-printed library materials. Raw data from statistical, health, environmental and mapping agencies should be made available at no cost to citizens, civil society organizations, and to primary and secondary schools for non-commercial research purposes.

Education and the Information Society

While access to information and communications technologies is a first stage in the development of an information society, it is not sufficient. The creation of an information society requires full and active participation of women, men, youth, minorities, ethno cultural communities, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, elders, people of all ages, and often marginalized groups such as the poor.

Everyone must have access to the skills and knowledge to work, design and produce information and knowledge. Access to ICTs for men and women of all ethnic groups and social classes will be achieved through equal opportunities for technical education, and through the encouragement of mindsets that allow individuals to develop innovative uses of technologies to find and use information and knowledge, to improve their quality of life, and to widen their choices.

Virtual and on-line education can never replace the need for traditional institutions. For ICTs to play this role, intellectual property rights must balance the rights of creators with the rights of users. Copyright law must not create overly restrictive legal barriers to the fair use, access and copying of information.

Internet Governance

New approaches to Internet governance should allow better cooperation on Internet management and not be a pretext to regulate Internet content of news or opinion. In particular, security considerations and the demands of the battle against crime, including terrorism, should not imperil freedom of expression and press freedom. The Internet and other new media forms should be afforded at least the same freedom and

protections as traditional media.

Public consultation and engagement should be an integral part of the development of ICT-related public policy.

Financing Mechanisms

Adequate and sustainable resources are required to fulfill the goals of WSIS. We recommend gender and disability targeted budgeting, the provision of the necessary funding to address the special situation of Indigenous Peoples, support for the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF), and creative and inclusive financial investment schemes and facilities. The government should continue and expand its support for the preservation and accessibility of current and historical information. Development priorities should focus on investments strategies for ICT enterprises run by under-represented groups.

Debates on financing puts disproportionate emphasis on private investment to achieve ICT for development goals. Development encompasses more than economic growth, and is premised on social justice and equity. The corporate sector is driven by market mechanisms which are not necessarily oriented towards equity and inclusiveness. The potential of community driven and owned ICT for Development (ICT4D) initiatives and networks should be explored and integrated into financing strategies.

Allocation of finance towards ICT4D must emphasize four interrelated aspects: technological and data infrastructure, systems to deliver ICTs at the community level, and social empowerment processes in the use of ICTs. Financing must be made available for activities related to these elements both within Canada, in order to sustain our own innovation, and in developing countries.

Free & Open Source Software (FLOSS)

Canadian Civil Society supports Free, Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS) and innovative intellectual property initiatives, such as Creative Commons, that enable users to have free access to, and build upon, existing tools and creations.

Participants consider that Canada's position should be one that supports, encourages, and promotes the development, production, and distribution of free and open source software models at the international level.

Participants believe that to best take advantage of the potential of wireless technologies, Canada's position, both at home and at international bodies, should reflect the fact that radio frequency spectrum is a global public good. International norms, regulations, and policies should be designed to respect it as such.

Partnerships

Partnerships should be trans-sectoral and transdisciplinary, creating points of entry for participation of Indigenous and groups identified above in all facets of the Information Society/ICTs. We also call for the development of socially and culturally sensitive partnerships between the business sector and other stakeholders of civil society.

Volunteers continue to play a key role in the development of ICTs and in the promotion of the practical

use of ICTs by other people. At the same time ICTs can be used to facilitate volunteer collaboration on a global scale and are an effective tool in international knowledge sharing (as in on-line volunteering). Volunteering needs to be recognized and promoted as social capital that can become the principal guide to a new way of attaining economic development, based on mutual respect and exchange.

The Canadian civil society organizations who participated in the drafting of this communiqué look forward to the Government of Canada demonstrating a leadership role within Canada and internationally on the items outlined in this document. These same organizations also look forward to further positive consultation and participation in this type of initiative.

Annex / Annexe

References / Références

Canadian community ICT leaders / Chefs de file des TIC au niveau communautaire

Canadian communities are leaders in the effective use of ICTs both physical, electronically mediated and/or elements of both. They have also been world leaders in developing and implementing effective uses for ICTs in the accomplishment of community specific tasks.

These include:

- Le rôle de Communautique <http://www.communautique.qc.ca> appuie le développement d'une économie sociale active à Montréal et au-delà.
- The Western Valley Development Authority <http://www.wvda.com> in enabling a transition towards the Information Society in rural Nova Scotia.
- Keewaytinook Okimakanak (K-Net) <http://www.knet.ca> in empowering the residents of First Nations Communities in Northern Ontario in the areas of educating their young people and maintaining health service in their communities.
- St. Christopher's House <http://www.stchrishouse.org/> in facilitating the transition of recent immigrants to Canada into the mainstream society.
- Collectivités ingénieuses de la Péninsule acadienne (CIPA) <http://www.cipanb.ca/> dans le domaine du développement d'une collectivité ingénieuse au Nord-Est rural du Nouveau-Brunswick.
- L'école éloignée en réseau - http://www.cefrio.qc.ca/projets/proj_34.cfm - in allowing the networking of students, teachers and classes in remote areas with the used of appropriate technologies.
- Bromont collectivité ingénieuse <http://www.bromont.com> in building a smart community in a Québec rural area

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 - Information Society Research Group (ISRG) http://www.orbicom.uqam.ca/orbi_info/vol03_no10/25mai.html ISRG is an international university consortium that comprises University College London, Queensland University of Technology, The London School of Economics and The University of Adelaide. Members of the group are active in applied research and consultancy for a number of international organisations including DFID, HLSP, World Bank and UNESCO. The ISRG working paper series provides a forum for emerging analysis on ICT, digital divide and the social uses of information, to be rapidly disseminated through this and other electronic resources, such as Eldis, ID21 and The Communications Initiative.
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