



**Statement on the occasion of the WSIS+10 Informal interactive stakeholder
consultation**

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**'The way forward: Harnessing information and communications technologies
for development'**

Introduction

I am speaking on behalf of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), a global network present in more than 50 countries, mostly in the developing world. Our comments today are endorsed by the Internet Democracy Project India and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). APC has been mobilising the power of ICTs for justice and development for the last 25 years.

Much still needs to be done to realise the WSIS goal of a "people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society"¹ where everyone can create, access, use and share information to fully promote sustainable development and improve their quality of life. This goal needs to be integrated with the post 2015 development agenda, and new and changing digital divides, both within and between countries, must be addressed.

The way forward requires integrating targets and plans for achieving the WSIS goal of a people-centred inclusive information society and the Sustainable Development Goals. It also requires acknowledging and addressing new and changing digital divides.

Based on our experience we want to stress the following points:

1. Access and effective ICT use

In spite of major improvements in basic access to ICTs, particularly through widespread access to mobile phone networks, lack of electricity and high equipment and connectivity costs puts effective ICT use out of reach for many people.

1 See ITU, World Summit on the Information Society, *Declaration of Principles. Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium*. 12 December 2003: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>

Access inequalities are particularly visible when disaggregated by gender, class and geographic location. Almost 60% of the world's population have still not connected to the internet. Close to 70% of households in the developing world do not have Internet access, and while Internet penetration rates have increased dramatically in recent years, the pace of change seems to be slowing.²

A stronger response is needed from governments to bridge access gaps.

We reiterate the importance of public access through facilities such as libraries and community information centres. Not only can they make free access available in safe spaces, they are also centres for learning and community development.

The principle of network neutrality should be considered in efforts to increase access. Quick fix solutions such as zero-rated access to social networking platforms via mobile service providers should be approached with caution. They risk increasing, rather than decreasing inequality by creating different categories of access and users.

A holistic approach is needed to achieve meaningful, sustainable access. This includes access, capacity development, useful content, appropriate technology, relevant applications, and an enabling cultural, economic and political environment.

Market forces, policy reform, government-led development efforts and citizen and community-led innovation each hold a piece of the puzzle. Together they can form a powerful vehicle for access that can drive development.

2. Human rights and the information society

WSIS's emphasis on human rights remains one of its most enduring features.

That human rights standards apply online is widely accepted, but not adequately respected. Rights to freedom of expression and to privacy are being violated through online censorship and mass surveillance. We ask for renewed commitment by states to respect and promote human rights on the internet. Rights and development are integrally linked. Both the WSIS and the SDGs recognise this.

3. Gender equality

The Geneva Declaration of Principles demanded the empowerment of women and their full and equal participation in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. Renewed commitment is required by all stakeholders to achieve this goal.

Poverty, patriarchy and violence keep women from being able to use the Internet freely. Limiting women's access denies them the tools, resources and opportunities available through the Internet, which in turn slows economic, social and political development.

Actions to promote women as innovators and decision makers in the ICT sector should be accelerated. Monitoring mechanisms should be implemented to better understand and coordinate efforts to achieve digital equality for women and girls.³

2 See Alliance for Affordable Internet, *The Affordability Report 2014*:
<http://a4ai.org/affordability-report/report/>

3 See ITU, Geneva, 28 May 2015, WSIS Forum 2015, *High Level Dialogue on empowering women to innovate through technology. Leveraging Post 2015 development framework to close digital gender gap*:

4. Good governance

Transparent and accountable institutions and citizen participation are critical to achieving the WSIS vision which states that ICTs should be used as an important tool for good governance. We call on member states to renew their commitment to the use of ICTS for good governance at national, regional and global levels in the overall WSIS review and to integrate the WSIS principles of multistakeholder participation not just into ICT policy making, but into all policy making.

5. Renewal of the Internet Governance Forum

Because of the WSIS we have the Internet Governance Forum. There is no other forum which is at the same time multistakeholder, open and inclusive, but also linked to the existing UN intergovernmental system where all States have a voice. It has become a platform for civil society to gather and take stock and to engage in debate with other stakeholder groups.

We would like to see greater participation of governments in the IGF and recommend that member states support renewal of the IGF for at least a further 10 years.

6. Participation and cooperation in internet governance

The principles of inclusive participation that were embraced at WSIS are integral to the WSIS review process, and its legacy. The goal of people-centred information societies can only be achieved through constant adherence to those principles, through processes that engage all stakeholders.

Multistakeholder participation has evolved, and it needs to evolve further to be fully democratic and inclusive. But recognising the need for improving multistakeholder processes should not undermine affirmation of the principle. Nor should support of multistakeholder processes be interpreted as denial of the need for regulation, or of the important role of governments in creating an enabling environment for social justice and development and protecting human rights. Enhanced cooperation and multistakeholder internet governance are not mutually exclusive. We need both.

We recommend that inclusive governance of the internet become the norm at national level. This requires recognition and respect for the vital role played by civil society in holding governments and businesses accountable for furthering the public interest and protecting human rights.

APC strongly supports the NETmundial principles which states that the internet is a global public resource that should be managed in the public interest. To ensure that the internet is governed and developed in the public interest needs acceptance of common values and principles. We believe that the NETmundial principles should be considered as a basis for achieving this.

7. The ten-year WSIS review

We recommend that the President of the General Assembly and the co-facilitators of the WSIS review, ensure an open, inclusive, participative and transparent process with meaningful input from all stakeholders – including by facilitating regional processes to elicit such input. Good practices in this regard include advance notice of opportunities to participate in person or contribute remotely, with such notice shared widely and accompanied by clear instructions on how to provide input, and

https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2015/Uploads/S/250/Call_to_action_WSIS_Gender_HLD_FIN.pdf

information regarding the intended use of this input. This approach includes making full use of remote participation mechanisms. We commend UNESCO, the ITU and the CSTD for their efforts to include stakeholders in the WSIS process and encourage the General Assembly to make use of and build on these.

We also recommend that the outputs of the review processes convened by the CSTD, UNESCO and the ITU, and which included input from all stakeholders are given serious consideration. Going forward we want to emphasise that the WSIS goals, and integration with the SDGs, require the involvement of these, but also of other UN agencies.

8. The centrality of a sustainable development vision

Finally, we want to emphasise the centrality of sustainable development to this process. Geopolitical debates on internet governance have overshadowed a central goal of WSIS - harnessing the potential of ICTs for development. Prioritising this goal is also political. It requires more than access to technology. It requires states and other actors to commit to social justice. To collaborate on to address problems such as poverty, war, insecurity, exploitation. To invest in human development, institutional capacity, human rights, environmental sustainability, and democratic, transparent and accountable governance.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our view today in this panel and look forward to working with you for a successful WSIS+10 event.