



## editorial

### Reasons for satisfaction

In retrospect just a few days after the second meeting of the WSIS PrepCom, I feel there are some very good reasons to be satisfied with its results, in particular with the approval of the draft declaration and action plan, which from now on will serve as basic working documents. There is no doubt that these two drafts, as imperfect as they may still be at this stage, and the adoption of an inter-sessional mechanism are the major achievements of PrepCom-2.

I am particularly pleased with the following accomplishments, to mention just a few: the presence of about 1,600 participants, the 100 or so very substantive contributions the Executive Secretariat received prior to PrepCom-2, the "visionary" interventions - to say the least - made by special guests during the opening session, most notably by the Presidents of Senegal and Romania, the input of the fifty and some experts from all over the globe representing several of our main partners, during the two days of intensive round-table discussions, the creation of a Bureau of Civil Society grouping more than 20 "families", which should help them formulate their expectations of the information society in a more coordinated way, the private sector's unwavering support mainly through the International Chamber of Commerce and its Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors.

All this is very gratifying, but the most arduous task still awaits us. Many challenges loom on the horizon, to name just one: a more extensive and effective involvement in the Summit's preparatory phase on the part of the international organisations, civil society and the private sector. With everyone's help and support we shall succeed!

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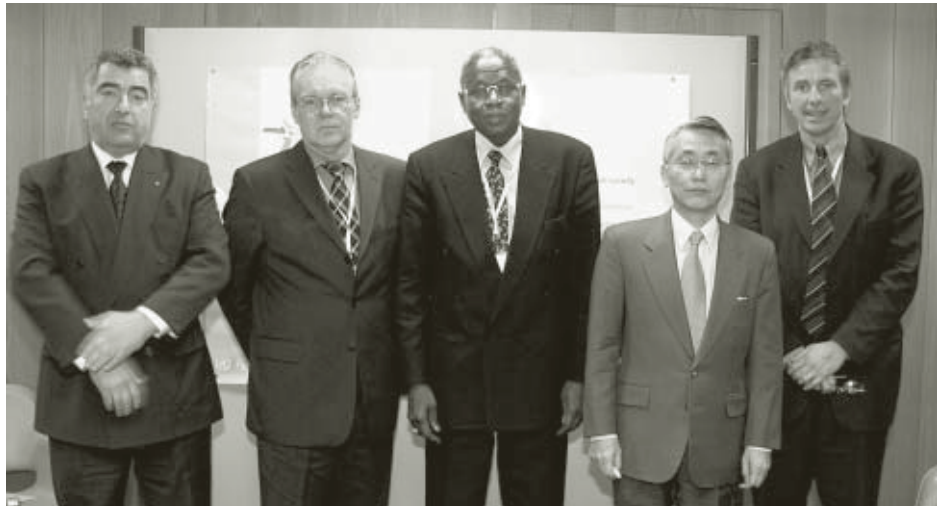
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## Outcome of PrepCom-2 Significant headway



Family picture at the end of PrepCom-2. From left to right: Ambassador Habib Mansour (Tunisia); Mr. Pierre Gagné, Executive Director/WSIS Secretariat; Mr. Adama Samassékou, President of PrepCom; Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, ITU Secretary General; and Secretary of State Marc Furrer, Director of the Federal Office of Communications (Switzerland).

**P**repCom-2 attracted about 1600 participants of which 918 were from member states, 398 from civil society and non-governmental organizations, 60 from the business sector and 25 from the United Nations and specialized agencies. Interview with Mr. Adama Samassékou, President of the WSIS Preparatory Committee.

### *Are you satisfied after PrepCom-2?*

"Yes, I think that PrepCom-2 was a success. Not only was there great interest in the roundtables, and first and foremost, of course, the visionary roundtable, they were very fruitful for the work on content which is central to this second session of the preparatory committee. In addition, we came away with pre-drafts of the Declaration and Plan of Action, which will be re-worked between now and the Summit. PrepComs of other summits in the past did not have this opportunity."

### *Do you get the impression that the bulk of the work has been done?*

"No, all we have done is to clear the way, so to speak. We still have to dig in. From

that point of view, this inter-sessional stage is vital because it will enable us to go further in finalizing the two documents I have just mentioned and to make headway in building a new partnership amongst the major stakeholders of the information society."

### *At this stage, can we talk about the start of a common vision of the information society?*

"Absolutely. That was clearly seen in the results of the regional conferences and confirmed at PrepCom-2. But there is a paradox: while we have all the elements of a common vision of the information society, they are unfortunately hidden behind the debate about procedure, which creates a

*"The first priority is to make headway"*



feeling of general discord. Yet, while it is certain that, in the course of preparing for the Summit, we will have large areas of disagreement that we need to better identify, there is a consensus today on many of the important points to be integrated in the basic Summit documents. I think that the work of the open-ended informal group of PrepCom-2, which will meet in July in Paris, will help us to reinforce that perspective."

***PrepCom-2 was marked by the presence of two heads of state. Can we expect even higher representation in the context of PrepCom-3 this September?***

"PrepCom-3 is supposed to focus on finalizing the pre-drafts of the Declaration and Plan of Action as well as on the development of by-laws governing the Summit itself. PrepCom-1 adopted only the by-laws for the sessions of the preparatory committees. The work of PrepCom-3 should be undertaken in the spirit of the UN General Assembly's resolution 56/183, which underscores the need to involve civil society and the private sector alongside governments. It will be an opportunity to stabilize and better finalize the new partnership ties amongst governments, civil society, and the private sector in the context of the Summit, and of the new society under construction. We must arrive at the Summit with a clear picture of the role and place of every major player in the process leading to the construction of an information society for all, a prelude to the society of knowledge and shared know-how."

***In your opinion, in which areas has PrepCom-2 made real headway, and which ones still have much to be accomplished?***

"PrepCom-2 made significant headway with the creation of the Civil Society Bureau and with the understanding by governments of the need for more involvement in the process by all concerned. Civil society's effort at organizing itself should be rightfully acknowledged, even though much remains to be done – such as choosing and defining the "families" of civil society."

***What are the priorities for the next half of the year to prepare the Summit?***

"The first priority is to make progress in the negotiations on content during this inter-sessional period, not only in a relevant manner, but to attract the attention of the heads of state and government so that they will turn out in great numbers at the first stage of the Summit in Geneva, while also understanding the need to meet again in Tunis. The second priority consists in reinforcing the new partnership ties by creating more trust amongst the various players in the information society. Another priority is, of course, to prepare the draft by-laws for the Summit so that we can ensure the greatest possible mobilization of all information society stakeholders."

***Will issues relating to new information and communication technologies be raised at the G8 summit in Evian early June?***

"I hope so. First, because the G8 meeting in Evian comes after the meeting in Kananaskis, which looked at the NEPAD project as a new African initiative, while focusing on the new information and communication technologies. Second, because we launched several initiatives aiming at drawing the attention of the high-level participants in Evian to the stakes of the information society as well as to the upcoming WSIS."



## Civil Society

### A historic event!

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), to be held in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, intends to lay the foundations of the society that we would like to build for the upcoming decades, given the profound changes taking place as a result of globalization and scientific progress, particularly the new information and communication technologies. Civil society was strongly mobilized after the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 56/183, which "encourages [...] non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector to contribute to, and actively participate in, the intergovernmental preparatory process of the Summit and the Summit itself". Civil society's commitment stems from the observation that only a true and effective collaboration among all involved in sustainable development, i.e. governments, the private sector, and civil society, will allow the development of an



A glimpse of the press conference at the PrepCom-2 closing.

information society able to fulfill the hopes of the world's peoples.

To meet this challenge, the international civil society has established a **Civil Society Bureau**. This decision was made at the second session of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom-2), held in Geneva from

17 to 28 February 2003, after intense consultations for over a year between the Civil Society Division of the WSIS Executive Secretariat and numerous representatives of civil society. The Civil Society Bureau is a decisive turning point in the history of the United Nations and of international negotiations. Indeed, it is the first time that civil society will have the means to effectively participate in the debate and will assume its responsibilities as a government interlocutor. In the Summit context, the Bureau cuts a path for new prospects to grapple with all the issues needing to be addressed in order to alleviate the very real concerns of our fellow citizens.

The Bureau is made up of the world's leading civil society "families": trade unions, academia and education, the scientific and technology communities, the media, creators and players in culture, local authorities, NGOs, the young, women, indigenous peoples, the physically challenged, etc. It also includes regional contacts tasked with weaving links with all continents.

As in the case of the Intergovernmental Bureau, the Civil Society Bureau's function is basically organizational; its purview is

not to deal with Summit themes. However, it will be responsible for raising awareness amongst all the active forces of society and for helping them express their expectations. The Civil Society Bureau will have to relay the positions taken and ensure that they are duly considered in the preparatory process as well as at the Summit itself. In addition, it will manage the "facilitation fund" to financially support the widest participation at the Summit by civil society, especially as regards least developed countries and disenfranchised groups.

The Civil Society Bureau will pave the way to ongoing dialogue with the Intergovernmental Bureau and private sector. This will help resolve the many procedural issues that have often hampered the work at hand. The creation of a bureau specific to the international civil society was heralded as a historic event, after its representatives met with Intergovernmental Bureau members on the 25th February, 2003. To ensure its development, the Civil Society Bureau will work closely with the Civil Society Division of the WSIS Executive Secretariat, which will serve as its secretariat.

**Alain Clerc**

*Director of the Civil Society Division/WSIS*



The Civil Society Bureau was welcomed by Geneva authorities at the City hall.

# Content

## An Alarming Observation

**R**andom connectivity, prohibitive telephone costs, outrageous prices for access to online scientific data, almost non-existent vocational training opportunities; these are but a few of the numerous obstacles that professionals encounter in developing countries when creating, processing, disseminating or preserving online information. The problem is even more acute in the least developed countries (LDCs).

Scientists, journalists, teachers, librarians and archivists in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean made this alarming observation at a meeting held from 14-16 March, 2003 in Lugano, in the Italian-speaking canton of Tessin, Switzerland. The meeting took place at the invitation of the Swiss commission for UNESCO and enabled some 70 experts from north and south to take note of the disastrous impact of the digital divide on these professions, without which the information society would exist in name only. The difficulty of access to information and knowledge that content professionals encounter while working in LDCs prevents them from participating actively in international cooperation in their respective fields. Further, their exclusion from the information society is also a burdensome handicap to social, economic, and cultural development in their countries, which are already at a terrible disadvantage, since information is at the heart of most sectors of human activity.

International professional organizations representing content professionals have welcomed the fact that the digital divide tops the list of concerns of the various bodies preparing the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society. However, said organizations fear that the Declaration and Plan of Action, to be adopted in Geneva next December, might be confined to a statement of principles and good intentions, with no follow-up. They want concrete action in the field, in everyday life. To this end, in close collaboration with many of their members from LDCs, they have prepared a series of national and regional projects accompanied with concrete measures. The implementation of such measures will make it possible to bridge the digital divide in their respective fields of competence.

These projects were developed following the in-depth studies conducted by the in-

ternational professional associations in 2002, notably in conjunction with the Swiss Italian University of Lugano. These studies helped identify the obstacles that professionals in LDCs encounter on a daily basis in the course of their work. Subsequently, concrete measures were developed profession by profession in order to remove the obstacles and remedy the insufficiencies. Thus, the conditions could be created for professionals in these countries to obtain the means to take part in the sharing of information, to increase their skill levels, and to be able to fully participate in international cooperation in their respective fields. Once finalized, these projects will be submitted to the participants at the Geneva Summit as concrete examples of what can be done in LDCs to bridge the digital divide.

**Alain Modoux**



Lugano: roundtable participants at the entrance of the University.

## Words of a Visionary



*"Digital solidarity would, for instance, consist of saying that all countries with an Internet usage rate above a certain level should take quantified action to help countries with a usage rate below a given threshold. The International Telecommunications Union could then establish various statistical limits and coordinate said action with governments and the private sector. On a practical level, it would be possible to conceive of a digital snake defined at the upper and lower limits. The common effort would involve ensuring that all countries are within the snake. The analogy with monetary integration and convergence policies is clear: as the snake evolves over time, the gap narrows. Ultimately, this evolution would bridge the digital divide. How it would work in detail could be spelled out in a Digital Solidarity Charter, which all state parties wishing to join would sign."*

**Abdoulaye Wade**, President of Senegal