world summit on the information society

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Switzerland
Ogi's special mandate

The Swiss authorities have called upon Adolf Ogi to assist in preparing for the World Summit on the Informa- tion Society, which will be staged in Geneva in December. Appointed for the occasion as special adviser to the government, the main task of the Confederation's former President will be to reinforce governmental contacts at the highest level. He will also be involved in reaching a broad consensus on the Declaration and Action Plan, two docu- ments to be adopted in December.
Following his retirement from government, Mr. Ogi was designated as Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on Sports for Development and Peace. By appealing to him, the Federal Council seeks to strengthen Switzerland's determination to ensure a positive outcome to the Geneva Summit.

editorial

Social dialogue
A tripartite model

In the process leading up to the WSIS, the involvement of new players – civil society and the private sector – has enhanced the democratic quality of the PrepComs. It so happens that the ILO in Geneva has in-depth experience of this type of three-way social dialogue.

Interview with Mr. Juan Somavía, ILO Director-General.

In what way can the tripartism of the oldest in- ternational organization serve as a model for the major conferences of the globalization era?
The ILO is built on the foun- dation of tripartism and so- cial dialogue. Experience has taught us that the most ef- fective way to adapt to change is to participate in the decisions under which change occurs, to hear the voices of those who will be affected by change, to understand their concerns and their aspirations. Listening to these voices is precisely what we need to do right now, if we are to redirect the path of globalization away from rising inequal- ity and toward greater social inclusion.

New technologies are a per- fect case in point. History teaches us that technologi- cal breakthroughs bring great benefits and create unforeseen opportunities for a more decent life. But, as with any change, there are those who gain and those who lose out. Tripartism enables the voices of workers, employers, and the gov- ernment to identify these tradeoffs, and to come up with solutions to lessen the social costs of change. It is my be- lief that globalization and technologi- cal change are inexorable forces. But they are not a force of nature: they are processes to manage, and tripar- tite social dialogue remains the essen-

Partnerships for action

"*We have learnt to accept poverty – but never will we accept to be cut off from access to information and knowledge.*"
This statement by a young student from Burkina Faso sums up the fundamental challenge at the heart of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). How can we harness the power of knowledge and information to empower people, reduce poverty and improve lives?
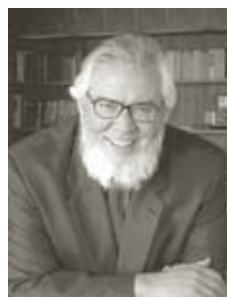The information revolution of the 21st century presents a tremendous opportunity for devel- opment. Not only can information and com- munication technologies (ICT) greatly facilitate the flow, dissemination and appropriation of information and knowledge at all levels of society. ICT also provides a cost-effective means for strengthening communications for devel- opment and for organizing sustainable, dynamic and demand-driven networks.

It will be one of the crucial tasks of the World Summit in Geneva to raise the awareness among decision-makers of all sectors of society for the extraordinary potential of ICT for development. Another will be to act as a catalyst for building partnerships that deliver tangible results.
The "ICT for Development Platform" – organ- ized jointly by the Swiss Agency for Develop- ment and Cooperation (SDC) and the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) – was conceived with these objectives in mind. Focusing on the role and uses of information and commu- nication technology for development, it is the largest event at the World Summit and the biggest gathering ever on ICT for development. It aims to showcase several hundred concrete and creative projects, products and ap- proaches from all parts of the world, and to foster the debate about the potential, trends and perspectives of ICT.

Past experience has shown that governments cannot resolve the many challenges posed by the digital divide on their own. Instead, new types of partnerships involving all major stakeholders – government, civil society and the private sector – are needed.
As a unique multi-stakeholder gathering, the ICT for Development Platform is ideally placed to stimulate such innovative, action-oriented partnerships. The different actors are called upon to combine their particular competen- cies and resources on the basis of shared risk, cost and mutual benefit – thus achieving a sustainable impact far beyond the bounda- ries of the Summit.

Walter Fust
Director-General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Chair of the Executive Committee, Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP)

tial tool in the management of change. I would venture that the successful countries in this interdependent world of ours are those where change has been anticipated and its consequences and costs broadly discussed, so that no one is left behind.

The same applies to international conferences. The process is very basic – reach out, involve the broadest range of people, perspectives, and ideas. The more people feel a part of the process, the greater the impact. This is an essential lesson I carry with me from my preparation of the Social Summit in 1995. We need to see policies through the eyes of people, not people through a prism of policies. Workers, employers and civil society – the real actors directly affected by change – should be a full part of a Summit process from beginning to end. If not, something fundamental is lost. The information society we would like to see emerging should be framed on openness, dialogue and transparency.

What is the ILO's perception of the issues at stake in the unequal distribution of information and communication technologies?

We are at different starting points. A digital divide is the inevitable consequence. It is true as well that the digital divide overlays pre-existing social and economic divides, whose contours in an era of globalization are ever more glaring. The inevitability of a divide must not, however, be seen as something to which we are powerless to respond. The heart of the matter is that the digital divide is really an economic divide. We must ask ourselves, is the availability of information relevant to improving peoples' well-being? The answer is yes. Is then the unequal access to information that could further our common good an unsustainable threat to the world? Here, too, I believe the answer is yes.

The path forward is therefore clear: narrowing the digital divide is a matter not merely of national policy focus – essential though this is – but a global policy concern as well. We need to redouble our efforts such that development aid focuses on expanding access to information and communication technologies. The ILO's *World Employment Report* of 2001, "Life at Work in the Information Society ", shows categorically the significance of ICTs in the development proc-

ess. Access to markets, transparency in governments and access to their services, opportunities for learning in remote locations, empowerment through information, these are among the benefits that ICTs bring to the development process and to improving people's lives. There is a consequent need for "catch-up ", and a need for global commitment, for example, through Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, as well as through public/ private channels, as through the UN Task Force on ICTs, to accelerate the narrowing of the digital divide.

How is the ILO able to contribute to the development of a positive mechanism for job creation and economic stimulation through NICTs?

Our research at the ILO shows that, over the course of the 1990s in the countries in which ICT use had become most widespread, productivity and employment grew significantly. While the global slowdown has interrupted these trends, I believe that we can still be optimistic over the employment-generating potential of ICTs. Of course, industry growth does not automatically mean job growth. Indeed, at the core of the ICT sector itself, such as in computer manufacturing, productivity gains have been such that output has soared while employment has declined. And it is also true that one of the implications of today's technological ability to diminish barriers of time and distance is that jobs can increasingly be located where skill and cost advantages are greatest. In the context of the current slowdown, that outsourcing of work has grown. That said, it is the use of ICTs in the broader economy where we will see the greatest effects on job creation. ICT-related jobs span the spectrum of skills, and the magnitude of job creation at the lower end of the skills spectrum, as, for example, in data processing, has been greater than for more skill-intensive work. For the ILO and our constituents, the message is clear: the path to the information society and the promise of decent work rely ever more on knowledge, learning, and skills. Indeed, there is no country that has made substantial inroads into the information society without having had an educated workforce prepared to reap the benefits of rapid technological change. Education and skills must be the focus of national policy and of ILO technical assistance as we enter the knowledge economy.

Summit in view
Switzerland's priorities

Substantial progress was made during the Prepcom 3 negotiations, and the host country is working hard to make the Summit a success. Marc Furrer, director of OFCOM and helmsman of the Swiss delegation, brings us up to date.

Following Prepcom 3, the WSIS Action Plan seems to be in better shape than the Declaration of Principles. Is this a good sign?

The Action Plan, which contains the concrete application of the principles set forth in the Declaration, is more advanced: It is easier to agree on implementation measures than on the wording of a political statement. This being said, the long list of actions could be tightened up and structured more sensibly. We are also working on incorporating these actions into the Summit Events. We would like the delegates in Geneva to be able to see, with the help of concrete examples at Palexpo, what the Action Plan actually covers. But we admittedly still have a great deal of work and negotiating to do on the Declaration. At the moment, we are completely involved in that.

Progress was clearly made in the area of actions to be taken, but how can the issue of financing, which continues to be problematic, be resolved?

It is pointless to decide on actions upstream if they cannot be implemented

From left to right: Mr. Marc Furrer,
King Juan Carlos and Swiss President
Pascal Couchepin at the opening of Telecom.

Civil Society
Taking stock after Prepcom3

Expectations were high among civil society activists about the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements we created in order for civil society to participate in the shape of the Declaration and Plan of Action of the WSIS: the Civil Society Bureau, the Content and Themes Group and the Civil Society Plenary. We all hoped that these mechanisms would lead us "from input to impact ". However, after two weeks of extensive networking and intensive negotiations, feelings among representatives of civil society organizations were mixed. Even though everybody welcomes the creation of these institutional arrangements, their effectiveness still needs to be improved to channel successfully our input. There is a real danger that they are seen as a simple cosmetic operation that concretely doesn't help channelling our aspirations. And civil society has some reasons to be frustrated. The suggestions it has made for input into the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action during the Intersessional Meeting in Paris have almost completely been overlooked and ignored by governments. The emphasis NGOs and civil society organizations attach to human rights in the information society and to the fact that this is explicitly mentioned in the outcome documents of the Summit has not been taken over in the official negotiations. The importance we attach to the concept of internet governance and to having an information society that doesn't focus exclusively on technology but that is open to the needs of all people has also been overlooked. The Plan of Action, in its present status, won't help humanity bridging the digital divide. Concretely, while civil society proposed to put people at the centre of the information society, the draft Declaration and Plan of Action are still bureaucratic and technology-driven. From 86 recommendations made by civil society during the Paris Meeting, 49, i.e. more than 60 per cent, have been totally ignored. Among the most important items that have disappeared, we can quote the importance of local authorities and communities in developing their own local content; the unhampered and unfiltered access to publicly available resources without manipulation and con-

downstream. The question of financing is a central one, and the Prepcom 3 delegates recognized this. However, as might have been expected, the financing mechanisms – I emphasize the term "mechanisms" – are still giving rise to differences. While we all agree that financing must be provided, the real issue is defining the appropriate mechanisms, which may vary from one country or region to another. We must also find new ways of financing ICT infrastructures in the less-developed countries, whether the existing funds are unavailable to those who need them, for whatever reason, or whether new funds are required. However, the latter situation must not lead to new taxes. The distribution mechanism needs to be regulated as well. In this area too, the principles will be decided upon in Geneva and put into concrete form in coming years.

The Declaration of Principles is currently four pages long. Wouldn't it be preferable if it were formulated a bit more concisely?
The objective is to draft an easily readable four-page document in which the visions are included. At the moment, there are still many things in the Declaration that do not belong there.

What mechanisms are planned for ensuring the follow-up on phase 1 of the WSIS?
Only if Geneva is a success will it be possible to guarantee that the next phase, up to and including Tunis, will assume its full importance. Naturally, we are in close contact with the ITU, the UN and the Tunisian organizers, to ensure that

the results achieved in Geneva can be implemented and monitored. Many issues will have to be given concrete expression, including financing, so we will need all the time available between now and Tunis in 2005.

Two months before the World Summit, what are Switzerland's priorities?
Switzerland wants the Summit to succeed. We are doing our utmost to ensure that the various stakeholder groups are duly represented. For example, the President of Switzerland and the Federal Councilors concerned are continuing to cultivate the necessary political contacts with their foreign colleagues in order to present the opportunities for contributions and encounters that the Summit will provide. We are also pleased to note that civil society is well informed about the Summit. That is why we are focusing our efforts on mobilizing the private sector and the media, so they too will benefit from the Geneva platform. In addition, we are working with Adama Samassekou, President of the Preparatory Committee, so that, on December 10, the Heads of state and government can make decisions about documents that are largely finished.
In this process, Switzerland sees itself as a facilitator. The appointment, by the Federal Council, of former President Adolf Ogi as Switzerland's special emissary to the WSIS should be seen in this light. Mr. Ogi will intensify and coordinate contacts with other governments during this crucial final phase, and will strive for a workable compromise in the Declaration and Action Plan.
Last but not least, we are coordinating the many Summit Events. Interest in the opportunities for contributing and making connections at the Summit is widespread; we have been literally flooded with requests. From this point forward, we need to be plugging every interested person into the appropriate place. And finally, we hope of course that everything – from logistics to security – goes off without a hitch, so that all WSIS participants will feel totally at ease.

trol; freedom of information as a means to reduce corruption; special needs for developing countries and non-commercial groups in frequency allocations.

Yet, thanks to the existence of the Civil Society Bureau, representatives of the "families" were able to prepare the meeting with the Intergovernmental Bureau and convey to them our common general feeling of frustration. Even though as CS we don't share the same views on all issues, we were able to speak out with "one voice " and echo this voice also in a large way in front of the press.

But to be more effective in our negotiation style we have to improve the functioning of internal democracy. It is not easy to organize the expression of so many points of view, which may even be divergent. Transparency in decision-making, accountability to one's constituency and legitimacy of the organizations elected to represent the "families" in the Bureau are issues that are not solved once for ever. To some extent civil society still needs to learn "the rules of the game". Governments are often well disposed and willing to cooperate with us, but governmental delegates

don't have the same flexibility as we do to propose, negotiate and adopt any proposal. Most of the time, they have to refer to their capitals for approval, whereas we are able to take decisions more quickly and defend our points of view. Hence the need for civil society and NGOs to carry on the lobbying activity even at this late stage at the national level at the one hand and prepare a minimum rock bottom document for the last negotiation round in November on the other.

Renate Bloem
President of the Conference of NGOs (CONGO)

Palexpo and elsewhere
The Summit showcase

Switzerland is working hard on several fronts to ensure the success of the World Summit on the Information Society. We are devoting special efforts to preparing the Summit Events, which will be an important component of the summit.

Switzerland has endeavored to locate the Summit Events in the immediate vicinity of the political discussions. The exhibition halls at Palexpo in Geneva seem made for that very purpose. They offer a unique opportunity to follow what is being discussed in the political segment of the summit, which will be taking place within easy walking distance, or to work out statements for presentation at the plenary session on the last day of the summit. Heads of state and government, along with representatives from industry, civil society and the media, have an opportunity to prepare their statements through discussions in a less formal setting. This corresponds to the spirit of a new kind of summit at which each stakeholder has an opportunity to interact.

The Swiss Executive Secretariat has developed a plan to hold the events as an important component of the summit. Several large events are being organized or supported by Switzerland.

There are so many interesting events that I find it difficult to describe any one in particular. Below are a few highlights of events in which Switzerland is participating and which are representative of many other initiatives.

The Department for Public Information of the UN, the European Broadcasting Union and Switzerland are putting together the World Electronic Media Forum, at which media personalities and politicians will discuss the media's role in the infor-

mation society. Together with the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is organizing the "ICT for Development Platform" in Palexpo's Hall 4. To date, this is the largest event on the topic of information and communications technologies serving development. In this 16,000-square-meter space, governments, national and international organizations, as well as companies from 80 countries will exhibit concrete projects, innovative solutions and real-life services. In the context of a multi-faceted conference program (ICT4D Forum), they will discuss challenges, experiences and trends in the area of development through ICTs. It is on this platform that the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, working with the World Bank, will organize the annual infoDev Symposium as a central discussion forum on the "ICT for Development" topic. Together with the International Trade Center, it will also stage an interactive workshop on e-business.

To learn more about ICT4D, I encourage you to read this bulletin's editorial written by SDC Director Walter Fust.

Additional events include the symposium with Nobel laureates organized by UNESCO and the CERN, where the role of research and science will be discussed, as well as the CyberFestival of local contents which will take place at the ForuMeyrin venue. One event will also be held outside of Geneva: in Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro and Mumbai, communications from all over the world on the topic of the information society will be projected on buildings or hills in six languages. One event is already taking place, in the form of discussions on the information

society and its applications organized in various Swiss cities by the "Science et Cité" foundation.

The Swiss Executive Secretariat was literally swamped with suggestions for events and tried where possible to provide a venue for each organizer. In order to make this abundance of events manageable, the summit portal was created at www.wsis-online.net. Featuring regularly updated information about all events, projects and exhibitors, this site allows summit participants to perform targeted information searches based on a variety of criteria and to create their own personalized schedule for each day. Even interested parties who cannot take part in the summit themselves can use the portal to stay informed about topics, projects and discussions, to make contacts and to download documentation. Moreover, www.wsis-online.net will be maintained until the second part of the summit takes place in Tunis in 2005, so it will be possible to follow the implementation of the WSIS Action Plan decided upon in Geneva. I invite you to log on now and get an early picture of the wide range of events by visiting www.wsis-online.net. By organizing and coordinating the Summit Events, Switzerland hopes to create opportunities for meetings that will enrich the discussions and hopefully lead to further projects related to the information society.

Daniel Stauffacher
Ambassador, Delegate of the Swiss Federal Council for the WSIS