



The World Summit on the Information Society

THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

During the past decade, the development of new information communication technologies (ICT) has provided a variety of opportunities for people the world over. Yet, a vast majority of humanity remains untouched by the digital revolution. There are real disparities between countries and socio-economic groups that are benefiting from information technologies, and those that are not.

The Summit aims to address the major social, economic challenges through the use of new technologies.

The World Summit on the Information Society will provide a unique opportunity for all key stakeholders to assemble at a high-level gathering and to develop a better understanding of this revolution and its impact on the international community. It brings together Heads of State, Executive Heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations, media representatives and civil society. The roles of the various partners (Member States, UN specialized agencies, private sector and civil society) in ensuring smooth coordination of the practical establishment of the information society around the globe will also be at the heart of the Summit and its preparation.

The Summit is being held under the high patronage of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, with the International Telecommunication Union taking the lead role, in cooperation with other interested UN agencies, and will occur in two phases:

Geneva 2003: First Phase

The first phase of the World Summit will take place in Geneva hosted by the Government of Switzerland from 10 to 12 December 2003. It will address the broad range of themes concerning the Information Society and adopt a Declaration of Principles and plan of action, addressing the whole range of issues related to the Information Society.

Tunis 2005: Second Phase

The second phase of the World Summit will take place in Tunis hosted by the Government of Tunisia, from 16 to 18 November 2005. Development themes will be a key focus in this phase, and it will assess progress that has been made and adopt any further plan of action to be taken.

Background

BACKGROUND

Resolution 73 of the International Telecommunication Union (Minneapolis, 1998) resolved to instruct the ITU Secretary-General to place the question of the holding of a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) on the agenda of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC now the United Nations System Chief Executive Board – CEB) and to report to the ITU governing body, the Council, on the results of that consultation. In his report to the 1999 session of the Council on that consultation, the Secretary-General indicated that the ACC had reacted positively and that a majority of other organizations and agencies had expressed interest in being associated with the preparation and holding of the Summit. It was decided that the Summit would be held under the high patronage of the UN Secretary-General, with ITU taking the lead role in preparations.

In 2001, the ITU Council decided to hold a Summit in two phases with the first phase to be held from 10 to 12 December 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland and the second from 16 to 18 November 2005 in Tunis, Tunisia.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 endorsed the framework for the Summit adopted by the ITU Council. The Resolution also endorses the leading role of the Union in the Summit and its preparation, in cooperation with other interested organizations and partners. The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 further recommended that preparations for the Summit take place through an open-ended intergovernmental Preparatory Committee that would define the agenda of the Summit, decide on the modalities of the participation of other stakeholders in the Summit, and finalize both the draft declaration and the draft plan of action. It invited the ITU to assume the leading managerial role in the Executive Secretariat of the Summit and invited Governments to participate actively in the preparatory process of the Summit and to be represented in the Summit at the highest possible level.

In Resolution 56/183 the General Assembly also encouraged contributions from all relevant UN bodies and other intergovernmental organizations, including international and regional institutions,

non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector to actively participate in the intergovernmental preparatory process of the Summit and the Summit itself.

High Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC)

A High-Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) has been established under the patronage of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General and Chairman of the United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB formally ACC).

Its purpose is to coordinate the efforts of the international United Nations family in the preparation, organization and holding of WSIS. All the members of the HLSOC have engaged to provide specific information about their work that will help develop the Summit themes. The HLSOC reports directly to the CEB and oversees the work of the Executive Secretariat.

The HLSOC is composed of a Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Executive Heads of the following UN specialized agencies: FAO, IAEA, ICAO, ILO, IMO, ITU, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, UPU, WHO, WIPO, WMO. It comprises also the Director General of WTO, the Executive Director of UNITAR, the Executive Secretaries of the UN Regional Economic Commissions and the President of the World Bank. The Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union serves as Chairman of the HLSOC.

Executive Secretariat

Executive Director: Mr. Pierre Gagné

Deputy Executive Director: Mr. Art Levin

The Executive Secretariat of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS/ES) was established under the authority of the HLSOC to assist in the preparation of the Summit. It is based at the ITU headquarters in Geneva, with the following mandate and terms of reference:

- Advise on all aspects of Summit preparation
- Prepare progress reports on the preparation of the Summit
- Develop an operation plan and a timetable for preparation of the Summit
- Obtain sponsorship and funding

A number of different organizations, including government ministries, private companies, UN agencies and NGOs have sent experts to the WSIS Executive Secretariat on a full or part-time basis. The composition of the ES is as follows:

- Staff from Member States

- Staff from the UN specialized agencies participating in the HLSOC
- Staff from the private sector
- Staff from NGOs and Civil Society

Host Countries Executive Secretariats

Switzerland and Tunisia have created working secretariats under the direction of their respective Ambassadors to the World Summit.

Participants

WHO WILL PARTICIPATE?

Governments

All governments have a stake in the Information Society, whatever their level of national income or their infrastructure facilities. Governments are key for bringing the benefits of the Information Society to everyone through the development of national and global policies and frameworks to meet the challenges of the Information Society. In their pursuit of the public interest, governments can raise awareness, facilitate access to information for the public, and they also can lay the foundations for all citizens to benefit from Information and Communication Technologies in terms of improved quality of life, social services and economic growth.

United Nations Family

The Summit offers a unique opportunity for the global community to reflect, discuss and give shape to our common destiny in an era when countries and peoples are interconnected as never before. The UN family of organizations serves as a catalyst for change by bringing together state governments, as well as the private sector, international institutions and civil society in pursuit of common goals. The United Nations system and its specialized agencies will be deeply involved in the organization and holding of the Summit, with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) taking a lead role.

Private Sector

The private sector will play an active role, in conjunction with governments and civil society, by offering an economically viable model to achieve the development objectives on the world agenda. The contribution of the private sector is instrumental in creating the material conditions for universal access to information and value-added ICT

services. Its involvement in the Summit will promote economic growth and new partnerships, technology transfer, increase awareness of new technologies, and motivate the creation of local content development and skilled employment opportunities.

Civil Society

Civil society is playing an active role in identifying the social and cultural consequences of current trends and in drawing attention to the need to introduce democratic accountability on the strategic options taken at all levels. Its diversity and, often, hands-on approach to issues, make civil society a key player in the renewed international partnership called for by the UN Secretary-General.

Preparation

PREPARATORY PROCESS

UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 recommended that preparations for the Summit take place through an open-ended intergovernmental preparatory committee, which would set the agenda of the Summit, finalize both the draft Declaration of Principles and the draft Plan of Action, and decide on the modalities governing the participation of other stakeholders in the Summit. The Preparatory Committee consisted of three meetings:

PrepCom-1, held in Geneva from 1 to 5 July 2002, elected Mr. Adama Samasekkou, former Minister of Education of Mali as President of the PrepCom and laid the foundations for the preparatory process. It decided on the Rules of Procedure of the Preparatory Committee, and on the Arrangements for Accreditation and Participation.

Between PrepCom-1 and PrepCom-2, five Regional Preparatory Conferences for WSIS were held, in the five major regions of the world. The

Pan-European Regional Ministerial Conference took place in Bucharest from 7 to 9 November 2002. It covered two regions (Western Europe and North America, and Eastern Europe), and was preceded by a subregional conference in Bishkek. Further Regional Preparatory Conferences took place in Tokyo (for the Asia-Pacific region) from 13 to 15 January 2003, in the Dominican Republic (for the Latin America and Caribbean region) from 29 to 31 January 2003, and in Beirut from 4 to 6 February 2003 and Cairo from 16 to 18 June 2003 (for the Arab region).

All five Regional Preparatory Conferences produced final documents, which, together with more than 80 written inputs from governments, intergovernmental organizations and accredited civil society and business sector entities, constituted the building blocks for the first drafts of the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action. These drafts were discussed at PrepCom-2, which took place at Geneva from 17 to 28 June 2003.

At PrepCom-2, governments decided on a formal procedure for inputs from all stakeholders. The Executive Secretariat received more than 900 pages of contributions from governments and observers, and compiled the individual contributions in a reference document of 357 pages. This compilation formed the basis for a refined version of the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action, which was submitted to an Intersessional Meeting in Paris. This meeting, which took place at UNESCO from 15 to 18 July 2003, worked successfully to produce a revised Declaration of Principles and a revised Plan of Action.

The first part of PrepCom-3 was held from 15 to 26 September 2003 in Geneva. It approved the Rules of Procedure for the Summit, as well as the Summit agenda and format. A number of issues in the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action remained unresolved and required further negotiations. For this reason, PrepCom suspended the session and reconvened during the week of 10 to 14 November, to continue negotiations on the two texts.

Outcome

OUTCOME

The Summit (2003) will adopt a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action, encompassing a broad range of themes, clearly defined so as to allow for focused discussion and planning. PrepCom-2, which was held in Geneva from 17 to 28 February 2003 developed working documents on the Declaration and the Plan of Action that will be developed further and discussed at PrepCom-3. The Final Plan of Action will be adopted at the first phase of the Summit in December in Geneva, so that it can be put into practice before the second phase of the Summit, which will take place in Tunisia. Development themes will be a key focus in the second phase in Tunisia and it will assess progress that has been made and adopt any further Action Plan to be taken.

Themes

THEMES

The Action Plan working document provides a list of issues to be used as a reference framework.

These issues include:

- 1) Information and communication infrastructure: financing and investment, affordability, development, and sustainability.
- 2) Access to information and knowledge.
- 3) The role of governments, the business sector and civil society in the promotion of ICTs for development.
- 4) Capacity building: human resources development, education, and training.
- 5) Security.
- 6) Enabling environment.
- 7) Promotion of development-oriented ICT applications for all.
- 8) Cultural identity and linguistic diversity, local content and media development.
- 9) Identifying and overcoming barriers to the achievement of the information society with a human perspective.

Switzerland

SWITZERLAND'S ROLE : GENEVA 2003, THE FIRST PHASE

Taking place in 2003, the Swiss Government and Geneva are proud to be the host of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. It will be the first major event that will take place in Geneva since Switzerland joined the United Nations in 2002 and is one of the first very important United Nations' Summit of the 21st century.

Geneva is recognized for its distinctive international presence. In particular, the prominent diplomatic community and the many important and relevant international organizations based here, as well as the significant experience of the Canton and the City of Geneva in hosting high level events will make a valuable and essential contribution to the Summit. The Summit will also provide an opportunity to strengthen and realize the synergies between the members of the international community based in Geneva. Finally, the Summit will benefit from and will be beneficial to Switzerland as an increasingly

important research and high-tech industrial center in Europe.

Partnership

The success of the Summit is a collaboration with Tunisia, host country for the second phase of the Summit in 2005; the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the leading UN agency for the Summit; all UN Member-States; the intergovernmental organizations (IGO), the private sector and the civil society.

For Switzerland, it is important that the Summit help create a World Information Society that enables all segments of society, in industrialized and developing countries, to have access to information and knowledge through the new information and communication technologies (ICT). In all countries, everyone should be given a chance to use ICTs for his or her personal, social, economic and cultural development and that of his or her community. However, governments cannot do this job alone. Business, which has been the driving force for development of ICTs as we know them today, and Civil Society, a prime user of ICTs for developmental applications, must be important partners in determining the outcome of the Summit. These partners will be the prime motors behind implementing the actions to have been foreseen by the Summit, working together with Governments.

Financial role

The Swiss Government has the financial responsibility to provide security and logistics for the WSIS in Geneva 2003. The Swiss Confederation and the Geneva Government are jointly financing approximately ten experts from various countries, working in the Civil Society and Government Divisions of the Executive Secretariat of the Summit under the responsibility of the Executive Director. In addition, Switzerland has created a host Government Secretariat with today fourteen staff members and an experienced Conference Management Company attached to it.

Financial sponsorship has also been made available from the Swiss Development Agency (SDC) to facilitate the participation of governments from least developed countries at the Summit.

Swiss Executive Secretariat

Daniel Stauffacher, Ambassador Delegate of the Swiss Federal Council to the World Summit on the Information Society Geneva 2003, heads the Swiss Executive Secretariat.

Switzerland has created a host Government Secretariat for the World Summit on the Information Society, the Swiss Executive Secretariat (WSIS-SES). The SES is comprised of professional staff members and has also retained the services of a professional conference management company to handle logistics needs in Geneva.

Responsibilities

- Diplomatic relations and intergovernmental preparations in Geneva
- Logistical planning and preparation for the Summit Geneva 2003
- Focal point office of the host country on behalf of Federal Office of Communication (OFCOM), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAE) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- Support and assist the WSIS Executive Secretariat (WSIS-ES)
- Coordination of side events in cooperation with the WSIS-ES
- Media coordination in cooperation with the WSIS-ES
- Contacts and relations with participants, partners and stakeholders of the Summit. Including Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in Geneva and New York, Canton and City of Geneva, UN, ITU, HLSOC, Governments, IGOs, NGOs, civil society and private sector

GENEVA PALEXPO OVERVIEW

