"Promoting the building of a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society, with a view to enhancing digital opportunities for all people"

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Indigenous ICT Taskforce
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1. People-centred and inclusive Information Society

For Indigenous Peoples, realizing these goals also means to overcome marginalization and discrimination that they usually suffer from. Otherwise, their full and effective participation in the Information Society will not be achieved.

Human Rights, and specifically Indigenous Rights, are therefore an essential issue for Indigenous Peoples to be included into the considerations when trying to build a people-centred and inclusive Information Society.

In many countries Indigenous Peoples, for instance, are still denied the right to their own cultures, including their languages. For Indigenous Peoples, issues such as multilingualism in the Information Society are not purely technical problems, but are deeply connected to recognition of their rights. The difficulties of establishing Indigenous media might serve as another example in this context. In many countries Indigenous Peoples can not exercise their right to their own media because of unfavourable media policies, including denial of frequencies for Indigenous community radios. Thus, any effort to promote the production of local content has to take these realities into account. Often, a purely technical approach to utilization of ICTs does not assist Indigenous Peoples to participate in the Information Society.

Consequently, the promotion of Cultural Diversity is another issue of prime importance for Indigenous Peoples when building the Information Society. From an Indigenous point of view promotion of cultural diversity and respect for Indigenous rights are strongly connected. It must be ensured that Indigenous Peoples are able to shape their future without risking the loss of their cultural identity.
Both the Geneva and the Tunis Summit have recognized the special situation of Indigenous Peoples:

In the evolution of the Information Society, particular attention must be given to the special situation of indigenous peoples, as well as to the preservation of their heritage and their cultural legacy.

*Geneva Declaration, para.15 (WSIS 2003) and Tunis Commitment, para. 22 (WSIS 2005)*

A successful implementation and follow-up of the WSIS needs to recognize existing obstacles. These obstacles should be addressed whenever relevant. Furthermore, a cooperation with other UN bodies such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues would assist the process of building a people-centred and inclusive Information Society.

2. A development-oriented Information Society

The special situation of Indigenous Peoples is being recognized as well in the development context. Many donors such as the World Bank, IDB, UNDP, EU, SIDA, NORAD or CIDA have developed particular policies and/or programs on Indigenous Peoples in their development co-operation. These policies should be taken into account in the current efforts of building a development-oriented Information Society.

The WSIS has established a strong link between the evolution of the Information Society and the achievement of internationally-agreed development objectives, especially the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Indigenous Peoples usually belong to the poorest of the poor – no matter if they live in industrialized countries or in developing countries. Thus, achieving the MDGs is of high relevance for them.

The *United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples* has devoted its last two sessions to the evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals in the context of Indigenous Peoples. From its conclusions and recommendations, the following three principles can be considered prerequisites for achieving the MDGs as regards to Indigenous Peoples:

- Respect for cultural diversity and the special situation of Indigenous Peoples
- A rights based approach to development
- Full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the development process and respect for culturally appropriate solutions as proposed by Indigenous Peoples themselves.

In relation to the evolution of a development-oriented Information Society such an approach would include, among others, that

- Indigenous Peoples have the right to connectivity and access to ICTs on their own terms
- ICT projects with Indigenous Peoples must be based on respect for Indigenous cultures and on recognition of the special situation of Indigenous Peoples
- The use of ICTs for development must respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, such as the rights to their cultures in general and to their traditional knowledge, their
languages and their modes of communication, education, health practices and knowledge sharing in particular

- Indigenous Peoples must be able to fully and effectively participate in any ICT program, project or e-strategy concerning them
- Access solutions and ICT utilization must be culturally appropriate as proposed and/or endorsed by Indigenous Peoples themselves.

The attached paper, presented at the first session of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development, gives an overview on the issues that, from an Indigenous perspective, are involved in achieving the MDGs and building a development-oriented Information Society.

Besides the promotion of Cultural Diversity and Human/Indigenous Rights, Access to Knowledge is an issue of paramount importance for Indigenous Peoples. Traditional knowledge is at the heart of Indigenous cultures. Its use and dissemination is related to ethical principles, regulations and protocols which are embedded in customary law. Traditional knowledge can not per se be in the public domain if it is considered to be recorded or disclosed. It is therefore very sensitive to include the digitalisation of traditional knowledge into development efforts.

The protection of traditional knowledge against unauthorized use and appropriation is also being discussed under the Convention on Biological Diversity and WIPO.

The CSTD should take into account the many years of work on Indigenous issues, highly relevant for the evolution of a development-oriented society, that have been undertaken by other UN bodies, international agencies and Indigenous organizations.

3. Enhancing digital opportunities for all peoples

Indigenous Peoples, wherever they live, are on the wrong side of the digital divide. Great efforts have to be made to close the gap. Many Indigenous Peoples have, for instance, no access to the Internet or do not have the expertise to take advantage of its potential (e.g. creation of web-sites or portals).

Overcoming the digital divide on their own terms is a major issue for Indigenous Peoples. This includes their right to culturally appropriate access to connectivity and ICT applications. It also includes the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in designing, implementing and monitoring any projects and programmes related to the evolution of the Information Society in their communities. Special attention needs to be paid to the fact that literacy and command of non-Indigenous languages is a problem for many Indigenous Peoples. Thus it is important to develop affordable culturally appropriate software solutions that simultaneously strengthen Indigenous cultures and languages.

However, since Indigenous Peoples are so profoundly affected by the digital divide they have little knowledge and understanding about ICTs and connectivity. To make fully informed decisions, it would be necessary to provide them with culturally appropriate capacity-building. To this end it would be essential to promote the elaboration of adequate models with full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples themselves and involving their own ICT experts.

Indigenous research projects would be a first step to the elaboration of locally adapted ICT strategies based on the needs and aspirations of the Indigenous Peoples concerned.
For further details please see that attached paper on Indigenous Peoples, MDGs and the Information Society.

4. Case studies and documents

