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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts in 2015 to implement the outcome of the WSIS

Submission by

European Union (EU)

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 18th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

Overall Review of the Implementation of WSIS Outcomes by the United Nations General Assembly

Written Submission by the EU and its Member States

Introduction

The EU and its Member States welcome the very significant progress that has been made since 2005 towards the original WSIS vision of a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented information society. That progress has particularly benefitted from the innovation, commitment and open collaboration demonstrated by the global community of WSIS stakeholders over the past decade. It is important that we recognise these achievements at the final stage of the ten year WSIS review.

However, we also recognize that the task is not complete. New opportunities to drive forward implementation have emerged, and the pace of technological development challenges us all to ensure that we harness new technologies to make a practical difference to peoples' lives in all communities, globally. We have much more work to do.

The EU and its Member States believe that the WSIS review should look in a balanced way across all the WSIS Action Lines and we have set out our contribution accordingly.

What should be the priorities in seeking to achieve WSIS outcomes and progress towards the Information Society, taking into account emerging trends?

The EU and its Member States believe that the future priorities of the WSIS stakeholder community should reflect the overall vision of achieving a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, as laid out in the Geneva Declaration of Principles. Our efforts should therefore continue to tackle the full breadth of the WSIS agenda. This means resisting the temptation to view infrastructure and technology as end goals, and instead focussing on enhancing the opportunities and quality of life for all people, worldwide.

The EU and its Member States identify six key priorities in seeking to achieve tangible progress towards the Information Society, taking into account emerging trends. These key priorities are relevant across the Action Lines.

1. **Align WSIS implementation to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals.** ICTs are a critical enabler of development. They are already demonstrating their potential to transform the social and economic opportunities of people across the globe. This should be the fundamental priority for the WSIS. The review should provide a platform to demonstrate to the development community, and to funders, of the value of ICTs for development.

2. **Promote an enabling environment for the development of ICT infrastructure, services and technologies, particularly broadband infrastructure.** The next ten years will bring new challenges, particularly the need to develop broadband infrastructure that provides quality connectivity in developing countries. This requires a renewed focused on capacity building and creating an enabling environment for investment.

3. **Strengthen human rights in the Information Society.** The WSIS process must strengthen the commitments made in the Geneva Plan of Action and Tunis Agenda to human rights, including freedom of expression and the right to privacy in accordance with resolution A/RES/69/166, as well as media independence and plurality. The review must recognize the need to protect and reinforce all human rights and to recognize their importance to realize economic and social development, ensuring equal respect for and enforcement of all human rights online and offline.

4. **Promote gender equality and women's empowerment.** Women make up half of the world's population and a clear gender divide has been identified. Equality is not only about rights; it is a question of smart allocation of resources. The world cannot afford to make use of only half of the human potential for growth and innovation. Gender issues should therefore be prioritised and mainstreamed in all areas of WSIS implementation.

5. **Promote open and inclusive decision-making, involving all stakeholders.** All stakeholders have roles to play in building the Information Society. No stakeholder acting in isolation – whether government, private sector, civil society or technical – can effectively achieve their aims in isolation. Transparency and access to information are crucial elements to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, freedom of expression, access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions (Sustainable Development Goal 16).

6. **Extend the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum,** in accordance with General Assembly Resolution A/RES/65/141. We support the many member states, as well as other stakeholders, who have already called for an extension of the IGF mandate.

A shared commitment to open and inclusive decision-making, involving all stakeholders, should underpin our efforts to make progress on these key areas of WSIS implementation. We urge all states to consider and respond positively to the voices of other stakeholders throughout the process of the review.

What are general expectations from the WSIS + 10 High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly?

The EU and its Member States view the WSIS+10 High level meeting as an important opportunity to welcome the progress we have made since 2005, to recognize the valuable contributions made by all WSIS stakeholders, to draw attention to the key opportunities, gaps, and challenges for further implementation of WSIS outcomes, and to bring greater practical focus to our future efforts. The EU and its Member States attach great importance to ensuring active and meaningful participation, inputs and engagement by all WSIS stakeholder groups throughout the preparatory process and at the High Level Meeting itself, in accordance with General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/302.

Most importantly, the High Level Meeting is an opportunity to renew our commitments to the key principles we agreed to in the Geneva Declaration of Principles, the Geneva Plan of Action, the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda. These include our commitments to a shared development agenda, an enabling environment for investment in broadband infrastructure, open and inclusive decision-making, fundamental human rights and women's empowerment and the need to pay particular attentionto the special needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups of society and to the needs of developing countries. Commitment to these principles will remain vital to achieving the overall WSIS vision, and should guide the efforts of all stakeholders in building the information society.

The High Level Meeting offers us the opportunity to make a clear and timely commitment to focus WSIS implementation on the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals. The EU and its Member States consider it vital that our efforts to implement WSIS outcomes makes valuable contributions towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, as part of a holistic approach. If we do not begin to achieve this alignment during the post-2015 follow-up phase, there is a risk that efforts to deliver WSIS outcomes will compete with the wider sustainable development agenda, or reduce our focus on those goals and targets. The EU and its Member States therefore view this commitment as a key outcome of the High Level Meeting.

What shape should the outcome document take?

The EU and its Member States believe that the outcome document for the WSIS+10 High Level Meeting should be a concise, high-level outcome document guided by the mandate set by General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/302.

The outcome document should begin by reaffirming our shared commitment to achieving the overall WSIS vision - in particular the key principles expressed in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.

In keeping with the nature and purpose of a review, the outcome document should then highlight the progress that has been made, as well as the gaps and challenges to implementing WSIS outcomes that remain, or have emerged, based on evidence from the last ten years. It should highlight new opportunities brought about by the pace of technological development, and identify the key priorities that will help to focus the efforts of the global stakeholder community, and recommend the necessary adjustments to the implementation of WSIS outcomes. These adjustments should help enable the alignment of WSIS implementation with our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The outcome document represents the final stage of the WSIS review, and builds on a number of years of preparatory work, including major reviews coordinated by the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), UNESCO and the ITU. The outcome document should draw on this substantial body of work. Many member states, as well as other stakeholders, have made very substantial contributions to these preparatory processes. It would be counterproductive and duplicative to attempt to achieve the same level of detailed technical analysis and assessment in the outcome document for the WSIS+10 High Level Meeting.

The outcome document should also avoid seeking to consider in detail ICT-related policy issues that are being addressed separately in the UN system, as well as other global and regional fora, or where positions could diverge to such an extent that it seems unlikely to reach consensus. Such issues include, but are not limited to: the right to privacy in the digital age, cybercrime, norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace and cyber security confidence building measures. Attempts to address such issues substantively in the outcome document for the overall WSIS+10 review would significantly reduce our chances of achieving a consensus outcome, and risk undermining efforts led elsewhere.

To what extent has progress been made on the vision of the people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in the ten years since the WSIS?

What are the challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes?

C1. The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development

There has been significant progress over the last ten years in building stronger cooperation between all stakeholders to deliver ICTs for development and drive forward implementation. Open policy-making processes bring in expertise and capacity from the private sector and civil society to inform policy development. Governments increasingly see the value of open and inclusive decision-making involving all stakeholders, which delivers better and more sustainable outcomes for the Information Society and the Digital Economy. The development of the Open Government Partnership, for example,

(ww.opengovpartnership.org) with 65 participating countries is one example that demonstrates the importance of this agenda.

Many countries now have national strategies for ICTs that involve full engagement with stakeholders. The High Level Track of the WSIS Forum has been a valuable platform for sharing information about these developments. Increasingly, countries are building in review mechanisms to their strategies in order to ensure that they remain up to date and effective.

There are certain policy areas where greater collaboration between stakeholders is needed, for example with regard to broadband connectivity. This requires effective broadband strategies which promote public-private partnerships, allowing for increased private sector investment and removing barriers to infrastructure deployment. Many countries have made effective progress in these areas but there is more to be done to support public governance authorities in some countries to work more collaboratively with other stakeholders.

Mechanisms for enhanced cooperation should continue to be flexible and involve all stakeholders, to ensure that we are able to respond effectively to the pace of innovation and change, and to ensure that processes are inclusive and accessible, particularly for developing countries. The WSIS review is an opportunity to endorse governance approaches which are:

- open and inclusive, with reduced barriers to participation

- distributed and local, with decisions made at the most local level possible and full involvement of the people who are affected by them

- transparent and accountable, with appropriate challenge mechanisms.

Faced with the unprecedented speed at which technology has developed, flexible, open and transparent governance models have proven to be the most effective and efficient ways of promoting change, innovation and growth.

C2. Information and communication infrastructure

Previous stages of the WSIS review process have rightly recognised the significant progress made in developing and deploying information and communications infrastructure. As a result, the gap in access to basic services between developed and developing countries has greatly reduced since 2005. By the end of 2014 there were already an estimated 6.9 billion mobile subscriptions worldwide – almost as many as there are people. By 2012, 87 percent of world's rural population was covered by mobile networks, up from 45 percent in 2003. Four out of ten people in the world now make use of the Internet, and that figure is growing steadily. Based on current growth rates, the Geneva Plan of Action target that over half the world's population should have access to ICTs is expected to be achieved in 2016.

This progress has taken place because governments have helped create stable and proportionate regulatory environments, promoting competition and market liberalisation, encouraging private sector investment in ICTs. It has been driven by private sector investment responding to consumer demand. Infrastructure development has largely been financed by the private sector, working in partnership with governments and other stakeholders. The World Bank reports that over the 2000s, the Bank supported ICT sector reforms which helped attract an estimated $30 billion in private investment for mobile infrastructure in the least developed countries[1].

However, new digital divides in access to ICTs within, as well as between, different countries are emerging. There is a risk that the rapid expansion in the use of technologies and services (such as big data, cloud, e-education, e-health, e-government services) requiring high speed broadband connections, terrestrial or wireless, may leave many consumers and citizens, particularly in developing countries, without adequate access.

There is therefore much more work to do to ensure the deployment of broadband infrastructure, which provides high quality connectivity, enabling all communities to enjoy access to the benefits of the Information Society. Given the pace of innovation, continued attention needs to be paid to investment in broadband networks and services, and to the application of ICTs to international development objectives, in order to fully achieve the WSIS vision.

C3. Access to information and knowledge

ICTs have enabled increased access to data and information, and promotion of knowledge over the last ten years as more content has been made available online and more people are able to access it. This has also increased transparency and accountability in many aspects of public life.

Providing local language content which is relevant to local communities is particularly important (see Action Line C8). New technology offers opportunities for people with disabilities but it also threatens to leave them behind as more and more of life is conducted online.

Development is measured not only by economic development, that ICT fosters on an enormous scale, but also by progress with respect to the realisation of fundamental rights as set out in the UN charter. The Internet gives every individual the potential to exercise certain rights and to access information. UNGA has recognised that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online". The Internet also enables the entire global community to monitor respect for these rights on an on-going basis.

These rights are still not respected in all parts of the world, however, and a major plank of the review of WSIS must be to address this fully. The Freedom Online Coalition, with 27 participating governments, has highlighted the importance of many of these issues. In many parts of the world, access to information and knowledge and freedom of expression continue to be undermined. The WSIS review

must address the fact that these rights are under threat from increased government restrictions on social media users and content and restrictions to individual rights to freedom of opinion and expression, or assembly and association online.

C4. Capacity building

Capacity building needs to be addressed in broad terms. It should aim to enable individuals and communities to achieve their potential, through education and skills, ensuring that there are trained teachers and opportunities to access learning. It should include professional ICT skills development, working in public-private partnership to develop the ICT leaders of the future. It is also about capacity for policy and strategy development at national, regional and sectoral levels, leading to better regulatory environments.

Many countries are working with the private sector to develop their ICT skills base and foster competitive IT-based services. Online learning opportunities are making education more accessible, particularly in rural and remote areas. The IGF offers opportunities at global level for capacity building and sharing best practices. Reinforcing links between emerging regional and national IGFs will make this even more effective.

The WSIS review is an opportunity to ensure that these strategies are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals so that there is an integrated framework for development.

C5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

The last ten years has seen good progress in building confidence and security, but at the same time the threats which face us have also increased. Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs also referred to as CERTs-Computer Emergency Response Teams) have been established around the world and there is increasing voluntary cooperation between them at both regional and global level. Many governments have national cybersecurity strategies in place and have implemented national legislation. The private sector and governments are working collaboratively together to address challenges to online security, including by raising public awareness.

All stakeholders have a responsibility to foster confidence, trust and security in the use of ICTs and work collaboratively to mitigate risks. There is more to do in terms of awareness raising, particularly among the public, and in terms of capacity building in developing countries. Many organisations offer assistance to developing countries: this needs to be expanded and built in to development priorities. The WSIS review should consider how existing sources of support for developing countries could be strengthened. Many international, regional and national organisations are active in this area and care should be taken to strengthen their cooperation, while avoiding duplication.

C6. Enabling environment

Many countries have opened their telecommunication markets to competition and privatised their incumbent national operators. Many have developed regulatory environments that are

transparent, predictable and non-discriminatory. This has allowed them to attract substantial private investment and take significant steps forward in building the Information Society.

The Alliance for an Affordable Internet has assessed the policy and regulatory environment in 51 countries and found five common success factors:

- effective broadband strategies

- enhanced competition

- efficient spectrum allocation

- infrastructure sharing models, which reduce market entry, infrastructure and operating costs

- universal access, for example using community centres, schools and libraries.

It also notes that the reduction of taxation in the short term leads to an increase in tax revenues in the long term. Many countries are lowering import taxes in order to make devices more affordable.

The WSIS review is an opportunity promote these reforms more widely, so that more countries and people can benefit from them. It is also an opportunity to consider what kind of enabling environment we will need in the future.

C7. ICT Applications

The last ten years have seen significant progress around the world in harnessing the benefits of ICTs for a very wide range of applications. It is crucially important that the WSIS review does not just focus on ICT infrastructure development but on how ICTs are used, and the benefits they can bring to people around the world. In areas such as e-agriculture, e-education and e-health we have seen many examples of innovative applications that are improving peoples' lives, their social and economic well-being.

More must be done to promote this agenda, and in particular to support developing countries to take up these opportunities. Alignment with the new Sustainable Development Goals is a significant way to achieve this. We also need to support communities to adjust to and benefit from the changes brought by technology.

This Action Line sets out a very broad agenda and we would like to see full engagement with relevant UN agencies such as the World Health Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation and others to ensure that the review is properly evidence based and consistent.

The WSIS review is also a platform to demonstrate to the wider development community and to funders that ICTs are a crucial enabler to development agendas in a range of areas. This must be the major priority for the review.

C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content The Internet has opened up to new languages and as more people gain access to it, more local content has been developed. Social media is also driving linguistic and cultural diversity online. There has been real progress in developing internationalised domain names, and this needs to continue.

More needs to be done to preserve cultural heritage and to ensure full respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, including recognition that everyone has the right to express themselves, to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice.

The ITU WSIS+10 Statement recognised the potential of ICTs "as a tool for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women". It identified a gender divide, however, and committed to "ensuring that the Information Society enables women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes"[4].

Tackling the gender divide should be a priority for the WSIS review. The CSTD report notes figures which suggest there is an 11% gap worldwide between men and women in Internet usages. It notes the conclusions by DESA that disparities between men and women in terms of education, income and social attitudes are causes of this[5]. Work by UNCTAD and others have described how ICTs can empower women.

C9. Media

ICTs have enabled a greater diversity and range of media over the last ten years. More people are able to express themselves online and online content is competing with traditional media. Although challenged by these developments, traditional newspapers, magazines and broadcasters have also been able successfully to exploit new online platforms.

There remain serious threats to freedom of expression and plurality of information in many parts of the world. Online censorship, restrictions in social media, website blocking and other measures are undermining fundamental human rights. The review of WSIS should consider ways of tracking and measuring progress here, for example by monitoring the number of countries with domestic legislation guaranteeing the independence and plurality of the media.

In many parts of the word, journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders suffer from fear of being subjected to attacks, reprisals, intimidation, politically-motivated prosecutions and arbitrary libel suits. According to UNESCO's data, over the last 10 years 675 journalists have been killed in the line of duty. Efforts to deliver this action line should reflect the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, which was agreed in 2012 under the auspices of UNESCO, including addressing the issue of impunity.

C10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society

New innovation in technology is leading to emerging ethical challenges, which should continue to be addressed. Incitement to violence online, for example, poses challenges to societies throughout the world and fuels violent extremism. It remains important to address issues of personal privacy and data protection, in line with the relevant resolutions at the UNGA and at the HRC, as new technology allows organisations to access and manage data in new ways.

Ethical dimensions should be factored into ICT capacity and skills building, including IT programing as well as IT management studies. As they do in other fields, for example medicine and law, ethics play a crucial role in preserving human dignity and respect for fundamental rights, and in ensuring a people-centred approach to the development of global information society.

C11. International and regional cooperation

The IGF has established itself as an essential forum for international and regional cooperation in the area of Internet governance, bringing stakeholders together to share best practice and shape policy debate. It is a valuable and cost-effective opportunity for networking at the global level. Its mandate should be extended for a further ten years period. National and regional IGFs are developing and replicating the success of the IGF.

The WSIS Review is an opportunity to endorse proposals to reinforce the IGF by:

- capturing and disseminating its work more effectively

- becoming more inclusive, particularly for developing countries

- building stronger bottom-up links with national and regional IGFs

- establishing better, more productive engagement with governments.

The IGF should retain its essential character as an open and accessible forum. Its value would be lost if it was directly funded or managed by any one organisation or if it became a negotiating forum.