

WSIS BACKGROUND

WSIS Context

- Towards the end of the 20th century, the transformative power of the digital revolution was being counter-balanced by the ever-widening digital divide. Recognizing that this new dynamic requires global discussion, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a UN agency, following a proposal by the Government of Tunisia, resolved at its Plenipotentiary Conference in 1998 (Resolution 73) to hold a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and place it on the agenda of the United Nations.
- The WSIS was endorsed by the UN General Assembly (Resolution 56/183) while according the lead role to ITU for managing the entire process.

WSIS Goals

- The goal of the WSIS is to establish a road-map for future national and international initiatives on the Information Society. The Information Society is one "where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."
- The WSIS intends to raise the awareness of political leaders on the importance of an Information Society and on the role that ICTs play in many aspects of development.
- It also intends to promote the deployment of communications infrastructure and encourage the application of ICTs across all social and economic sectors.

WSIS Structure

- The WSIS is being held in two phases. The first phase was held in Geneva from Dec 10-12, 2003; the second phase will be held in Tunis from Nov 16-18, 2005.
- Summit participants include: government representatives, UN and other intergovernmental agencies, the private sector, and civil society (ie, NGOs).
 - Like all UN Summits, WSIS is basically an intergovernmental process. Decisions are taken by States. Ultimately, if it comes to voting, only Government delegations can vote.
 - Everyone else participates in WSIS as observers. Observers have a standing invitation to participate in the sessions and work of the General Assembly- this includes the UN Secretariat, UN specialized agencies, other intergovernmental organizations, accredited civil society entities, and accredited private sector entities (including all ITU Sector Members, which are automatically accredited).
 - Observers from the UN Secretariat, UN specialized agencies, and intergovernmental organizations can participate, without the right to vote, in the deliberations in the plenary and, as appropriate, in committees or

subcommittees on questions within the scope of their activities. This is also valid for closed sessions.

- Observers from accredited civil society and private entities can sit as observers in public meetings (plenary, committee or subcommittee meetings). Upon the invitation of the presiding officer of the body concerned, and subject to the approval of that body, such observers may make oral statements on questions in which they have special competence. If the number of requests to speak is too large, they will be asked to form themselves into constituencies, which will then speak through their respective spokespersons.
- Each phase of the Summit marks the culmination of many months of consultations and negotiations among government representatives, UN experts, the private sector, and civil society, who review vast amounts of information and share a broad spectrum of experiences in issues related to the Information Society. These consultations and negotiations take place prior to the Summit itself and are referred to as the Preparatory Process. The Preparatory Process is run by an intergovernmental Preparatory Committee (PrepCom).
- The general tasks of the PrepCom are to:
 - Define the agenda of each Summit,
 - Decide who would participate and how, and
 - Prepare final documents for ratification at each Summit.

WSIS Phase I

- The events occurring during WSIS Phase I included:
 - PrepCom 1
 - PrepCom 2
 - Intersessional meeting (between PrepCom 2 and 3)
 - PrepCom 3
 - Regional conferences
 - Thematic workshops
 - Geneva Summit

PrepCom 1 (Geneva, July 1-5, 2002)

- Government representatives, IGOs, and certain private and civil society groups made general statements.
- Various groups provided reports on their activities related to WSIS.
- Two subcommittees were developed:
 - Subcommittee 1: draft rules of procedure for the PrepCom and Summit, and accreditation rules
 - Subcommittee 2: examine proposed themes for the Summit and possible outcomes
- Draft rules of procedure for the PrepCom were developed. Draft rules for the Summit were tabled until PrepCom 2.
- Draft rules of participation were developed.

- Accreditation rules were developed.
- Draft principles and themes guiding the preparatory work and WSIS were developed.

PrepCom 2 (Geneva, February 17-28, 2003)

- Regional conferences provided reports.
- 8 roundtables were held based on the themes identified by Subcommittee 2. Reports on the outcome of these roundtables were given.
- A small working group was set up within Subcommittee 2 to draft a Declaration of Principles and Action Plan for WSIS. The working group developed draft documents, but was unable to synthesize all inputs from observers. Although the working group recommended to PrepCom that these inputs be ultimately included, the PrepCom decided that the observers' inputs be reflected in a separate section, with the understanding that government representatives would constitute the basis of negotiations.
- The PrepCom identified additional work that needed to be completed over the inter-sessional period, between PrepComs 2 and 3.

PrepCom 3 (Geneva, September 15-26, November 10-14, December 5-9, 2003)

- Various groups provided reports on their activities related to WSIS.
- Draft rules of procedure for the Summit were adopted.
- Draft versions of the Declaration of Principles and Action Plan were further developed.
- The draft agenda and proposed format for the Geneva Summit continued to be developed. Finally, on December 9, negotiations completed and final versions of the documents were prepared for submission to the Geneva Summit for adoption.

Geneva Summit (Geneva, December 10-12, 2003)

- PrepCom made a statement about the work done during the Preparatory Process.
- Government representatives, IGOs, and certain private and civil society groups made general statements.
- 3 roundtables were held based on 3 themes: (1) Creating Digital Opportunities, (2) Opportunities and Challenges: Diversity in Cyberspace, and (3) ICT as a Tool to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Accounts of the roundtables are provided in the Final Report of the Summit.
- Reports from multi-stakeholder events were presented.
- The Declaration of Principles and Action Plan were adopted.
- This Summit marked the end of Phase I of WSIS. It resulted in a Declaration of Principles and an Action Plan. Phase II will deal with the transition towards a knowledge society. It will likely result in the adoption of a charter, as well as a Tunis Agenda setting forth regional action plans.

WSIS Declaration of Principles

- Includes a Common Vision of the Information Society
- Lays out 11 Key Principles for An Information Society for All
 - The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development
 - Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for an inclusive information society
 - Access to information and knowledge

- Capacity building
- Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs
- Enabling environment
- ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life
- Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content
- Media
- Ethical dimensions of the Information Society
- International and regional cooperation

WSIS Action Plan

- The plan translates the 11 principles identified in the Declaration into concrete action lines on the national level.

WSIS Phase II

- The events occurring during WSIS Phase I include:
 - PrepCom 1
 - PrepCom 2
 - PrepCom 3
 - Regional conferences
 - Thematic workshops
 - Tunis Summit

PrepCom 1 (Hammamet, Tunisia, June 24-26, 2004)

- Government representatives made general statements.
- The Task Force on Financial Mechanisms and the Working Group on Internet Governance gave reports. These two groups were established during the Geneva phase (in the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action).
 - Task Force on Financial Mechanisms: This group will assess existing financial mechanisms in meeting the challenges related to promoting investment in and the use of IT for development in developing countries.
 - The Working Group on Internet Governance: The main activity of the WGIG will be “to investigate and make proposals for action, as appropriate, on the governance of Internet.” Issues include control of domain names, etc.
- A third group was created: Group of Friends of the Chair (GFC), tasked with preparing a draft final document (with a political and operational part) to serve as a basis for negotiations in PrepCom2.
- The focus, output, and structure of the process for the Tunis phase were decided:
 - Focus of Tunis phase:
 - Follow-up and implementation of the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action by stakeholders at national, regional, and international levels.
 - Consideration of the report of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms, and appropriate action.

- Consideration of the report of the Working Group on Internet Governance, and appropriate action.
 - Output of Tunis phase:
 - A final document, or set of documents, with a political part and an operational part, which reflect the areas of focus in the Tunis phase and reaffirm the decisions made in the Geneva phase.
 - Structure of the preparatory process for the Tunis phase:
 - There will be 2 more PrepComs (2 and 3) before the Tunis Summit.
 - The two groups will continue to meet and report at PrepComs 2 and 3.
 - Relevant thematic and regional conferences will continue and report at PrepComs 2 and 3.

PrepCom 2 (Geneva, February 17-25, 2005)

- Various groups provided reports on their activities related to WSIS. The three groups identified at PrepCom 1 gave reports. In addition, there were reports from regional conferences and thematic meetings.
 - The GFC presented a draft final document with two parts: political (called "Political Chapeau") and operational (called "Operational Part"). The Political Chapeau is also known as the Tunis Commitment, and the Operational Part is also known as the Tunis Agenda for Action. This draft was developed based on contributions from all stakeholders, as well as discussions during GFC meetings.
- Observers presented statements on the draft final text.
 - **OCW**: The Education, Academia and Research Taskforce of WSIS Civil Society gave their input to the Political Chapeau and Operational Part, proposing, among many other items, to consider opencourseware as a new item to be incorporated both into the Political Chapeau and Operational Part.
- On the basis of statements and written contributions from participants, proposals were compiled for edits to the Political Chapeau, and Chapters 1 (implementation mechanisms), 2 (financial mechanisms), and 4 (the way ahead) of the Operational Part.
- A Sub-Committee met 14 times to discuss these proposals and developed revised versions of the final text.
- It was decided that the revised versions of the Political Chapeau and chapter 2 of the Operational Part, along with a compilation document containing all proposals, will be forwarded as is to PrepCom 3. The GFC will continue to work on revising Chapters 1 (implementation mechanisms) and 4 (the way ahead) of the Operational Part. They will submit revised versions, along with a compilation document, to PrepCom 3. Groups can continue to make proposals for these two chapters before PrepCom 3.

Political Chapeau

- This document reaffirms the principles identified in the Declaration Principles from WSIS Phase I and places emphasis on the following issues for WSIS Phase II:
 - Financial mechanism for bridging the digital divide
 - Internet governance

- Follow-up and implementation of the Geneva and Tunis decisions

Operational Part

- Chapter 1: Implementation Mechanisms
 - Establishes an implementation mechanism for every action line in both the Geneva and Tunis Plans of Action. A separate team of stakeholders will be dedicated to following up on every action line.
 - The UN Secretary-General will nominate the body to coordinate this process.
- Chapter 2: Financial Mechanisms
 - Reviews the effectiveness of existing financial mechanisms for overcoming the digital divide.
 - Proposes areas for which financing should be focused, such as ICT capacity-building programs, IT services, infrastructure, etc.
- Chapter 3: Internet Governance
 - This chapter will be subject to a lot of discussion during PrepCom 3. It will ultimately:
 - Develop a working definition of Internet governance
 - Identify the public policy issues that are relevant to Internet governance
 - Develop a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments, existing international organizations and other forums, as well as the private sector and civil society in both developing and developed countries
- Chapter 4: Follow-up
 - Requests that the UN Secretary-General provide sustained follow-up within the UN system on the agreements and commitments reached at WSIS, and provide periodic reports to the General Assembly on follow-up efforts.

PrepCom 3 (Geneva, September 19-30, 2005)

- Based on the draft agenda on the WSIS Web site, PrepCom 3 activities will mainly focus on:
 - Reports from the GFC, WGIG, regional conferences, and thematic meetings.
 - **OCW:** The WSIS Thematic Meeting hosted by the Government of Japan/ITU/UNU ("Tokyo Ubiquitous Network Conference, 16-17 May 2005, Tokyo) has submitted a Chairman's Report to be considered for PrepCom 3. OpenCourseware is mentioned as an important element of the "Ubiquitous Network Society."
 - **OCW:** The International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) is planning on submitting a report from the WCCE 2005, which refers to the importance of open educational content for developing "digital solidarity."
 - countries while respecting International Property Rights.
 - Discussion and finalization of the Political Chapeau and the Operational Part.

Tunis Summit (Tunis, November 16-18, 2005)

- Based on the draft agenda on the WSIS Web site, the Tunis Summit will mainly consist of:
 - Report from the Preparatory Committee on the accomplishments during the Preparatory Process
 - General debate (mainly statements from heads of state and government officials, although observers will also have limited "floor time")

- Reports from Multi-stakeholder Events
- Adoption of the final documents
- Adoption of the Report of the Tunis phase of the Summit
- Round tables, high-level panels, parallel events are also held in parallel with the main plenary sessions.