

Swiss platform for the Information Society: proposals for the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action for the World Summit on the Information Society

Principles:

1. Information should be considered as public property and not merely as commercial merchandise.
2. The information society must be viewed as placing the public interest and the rights and needs of citizens at the core. The technologies and infrastructures of communications and information are means and not ends in themselves. The approach to each theme must place equal emphasis on ethical and social concerns as it does on the technical and economic dimensions.
3. The information society must be guided by objectives of peace, justice, equality and sustainable development at the social, economic and environmental level. It must permit access to the means of information and communication (reception and production) to all. Priority must be given to those who today are excluded from the information society, notably women. It must limit to the maximum extent possible its negative impact on the environment.
4. The information society must guarantee for all the right to freedom of expression and information. It should notably be founded on respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular articles 19, 27 and 28, which stipulate that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression" and that "everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community."
5. The information society must reflect the diversity of cultures, languages and ways of thinking in order to guarantee the development of open, lively and tolerant societies.
6. The information society must be firmly based on democratic foundations and on a real participation of all citizens. It should place the notions of communication, exchange and ownership (individual and collective) at the heart of its concerns and recognise local initiatives as crucial to its functioning.
7. An overall approach to the information society cannot limit itself to the field of new information and communications technologies. It must include "traditional" media (television, radio, printed press) and guarantee a universal public service of quality, ensuring access to information and communications for the least favoured members of society, be it in the North or the South.
8. Civil society must be able to fully participate in the implementation of the Summit's Declaration and Plan of Action. Participation and representation of civil society must be balanced and include the diverse geographical regions, linguistic and socio-cultural groups, as well as guaranteeing gender parity.
9. The diversity of economic systems, notably those aimed at achieving socio-economic solidarity, must be fully taken into account in the conclusions of the Summit. Small and medium-sized enterprises, production co-operatives, mutual benefit societies and independent workers, notably in the South, must be able to participate fully in the implementation and Plan of Action of the Summit

Plan of Action

I) Infrastructure and access

1. Create an innovative and binding international funding mechanism (fund, tax, etc.) for the development of infrastructure and skills at the international, regional and national levels aimed as a priority at the least favoured regions and developing countries. The management and utilisation of this funding mechanism should exclude mercantile interests and be implemented in close co-operation with representatives of civil society.
2. Carry out in depth and independent studies of the consequences of liberalisation of telecommunications. Ensure a non-restrictive interpretation of the agreements concluded in the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), permitting developing countries to elaborate national regulatory policies (subsidies, taxes, regulations) with a view to guaranteeing universal access to infrastructure in a spirit of public service. Find appropriate mechanisms to reduce costs of access and communications in developing countries.
3. Promote environmentally-friendly information and communication technologies (management of bio-diversity, teleconferences, etc.) and limit their negative impact, notably through reduced electrical energy consumption, by extending the life-span of electronic equipment and appliances and organising their collection and disposal when obsolete.

II) Content and access to knowledge and information

1. Establish regulatory mechanisms and appropriate legislation in order to limit the concentration of media and guarantee plurality among the types of media (private, public, community) as well as among producers of content.
2. Encourage the creation of independent media, as well as equally independent public radio-television networks, and stimulate production of local content in all countries, particularly in the developing countries. Such media, whether independent or public, must be grounded upon a clear legal basis, with guaranteed editorial freedom and public participation; they must take into account and respect cultural and linguistic minorities; there must be an independent regulatory body and a clear and stable method of financing.
3. Develop links between the "traditional" media and new information technologies and promote community access to information and communications. Support community media as a means to meet the needs of specific population and other groups and stimulate the production of appropriate content.
4. Encourage the transfer of knowledge and invest in the development of skills. Special attention should be given to training programmes for women, in order to increase their political, cultural and social participation in the information society, and support the production of local content corresponding to their needs and reflecting their aspirations.
5. Reaffirm the meaning of intellectual property rights so as to guarantee a balance between private interests and the protection of public interests. To this end, broaden the spectrum of public properties exempted from intellectual property rights and protect access for all to archives and other public data-banks. Reaffirm the notion of information as public property.
6. Ensure freedom from patent restrictions on primary software codes. Promote use of unrestricted software as an alternative way of encouraging innovation and the development of appropriate technologies. Give preference to use of unrestricted software in all aspects of public administration, notably in education and training programmes.

III) Governance

1. Guarantee a balanced participation of developing countries and authentic tripartite structures (governments, civil society and private sector) in all international regulatory bodies linked to the information society, notably in the framework of WTO, ITU, WIPO and ICANN.
2. Develop use of new information and communication technologies in public administrations, in order to enhance transparency, access to information and democratic participation. Special emphasis should be placed on implementation of policies and tools facilitating participation by under-privileged regions and communities in the elaboration of local, regional and national policies.
3. Take appropriate steps to guarantee the protection of personal data of citizens, particularly in the fields of the new information and communications technologies.

IV) Freedom of expression and information

1. Guarantee respect in the information society for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably articles 19 and 28 which protect freedom of expression and opinion, and the right to participate in the cultural life of the community, whatever the media.
2. Guarantee the public's right to information and a broad access for journalists and citizens to the data held by the various public authorities.
3. Promote freedom of information and protect the practice of independent journalism in all media, particularly in regions of conflict. Recognise the right of the journalistic profession to draw up its own code of conduct, including in the new electronic media.

Annex: rules of procedure of the Summit and arrangements regarding accreditation

The members of the Swiss platform for the World Summit on the Information Society support the position and demands of international civil society regarding the rules of procedure and arrangements for accreditation, expressed at the end of the first Preparatory Committee meeting in Geneva (1-5 July 2002).

The following organisations and individuals are founding members of the Swiss platform for the Information Society and are co-signers of this position paper:

Organisations:

- Action de Carême, Lausanne/Lucerne
- Communauté de travail des œuvres d'entraide (Swissaid/Action de Carême/Pain pour le prochain/Helvetas/Caritas), Lausanne
- Conseil Mondial de la Radio-Télévision, Genève
- Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale (EPFL), Lausanne
- Fédération suisse des journalistes
- Fondation Hironnelle, Lausanne
- Institut Universitaire d'Etudes du Développement, Genève
- InfoSud, Lausanne
- Intermédia, Berne
- Media Action International, Versoix
- Pain pour le prochain, Lausanne/Berne

Individuals

- Marie Thorndahl
- Thomas Ruddy