

INFORMATION NOTE

The World Summit on the Information Society

1. Background to the World Summit on the Information Society

1.1 The idea of holding a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was first conceived at the conference of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) convened in 1998. The conference adopted a resolution calling for holding WSIS against the background of a widening gap between information "haves" and "have nots" amid growing importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) at the political, economic and cultural spheres. In 2001, ITU decided to hold WSIS in two phases, with the first phase to be held from 10 to 12 December 2003 in Geneva of Switzerland and the second in 2005 in Tunis of Tunisia.

1.2 ITU will hold WSIS together with the United Nations (UN). In December 2001, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution which endorsed WSIS to be held under the patronage of the Secretary-General of UN, with ITU taking the lead role in the preparation of the summit.

2. Participants in the World Summit on the Information Society

2.1 WSIS is designed to actively involve the global community. As such, WSIS is expected to be attended by key stakeholders, such as heads of state, executive heads of the UN specialized agencies and other international organizations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media.

2.2 No accreditation is required for the representatives of the governments, UN specialized agencies and other international organizations to attend WSIS. However, the private sector, NGOs and media representatives have to submit accreditation requests to ITU should they be interested in participating in WSIS.

2.3 According to ITU, it will compile a list of participants in the summit and post it on the WSIS website¹ during the third week of November.

¹ The website address of WSIS is www.itu.int/wsis/.

3. Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society

3.1 The Geneva phase of WSIS aims to provide a global platform for all key stakeholders to develop a common vision and understanding of the information society. WSIS will address a number of inevitable issues raised by the development of the information society, which are of particular relevance for policy formulation as well as socioeconomic and technological developments. These issues include building the ICT infrastructures, providing universal and equitable access to the information society, addressing user needs, and adapting the school curriculum to meet the challenges of the information society.

3.2 The anticipated outcome for WSIS is to adopt a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action for implementation by all key stakeholders to cope with the new challenges posed by the ever-evolving information society, especially identifying ways to reduce the digital divide.

Declaration of Principles

3.3 The Declaration of Principles should embody a set of principles and rules of conduct required for establishing a more inclusive and equitable information society. In particular, the Declaration will set out the common vision of the information society, which is characterised by, among other things, universal access to ICT infrastructures and services.

Plan of Action

3.4 The Plan of Action should be the expression of a consensus among governments, the private sector and other major stakeholders on the roadmap for the way ahead. In particular, the Plan will contain operational proposals and concrete measures, for instance, on the elimination of bottlenecks hampering the bridging of the digital divide. The Plan will also contain measurable milestones/benchmarks for monitoring and evaluation against the goals set at WSIS.

4. Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society

4.1 Development themes will be a key focus in the Tunis phase of WSIS. The summit will also assess the progress that has been made and refine the Plan of Action adopted in 2003.

5. Preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society

5.1 Three Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meetings and several regional conferences have been convened for the preparation of WSIS. These meetings/conferences were attended by government representatives and other non-government stakeholders (e.g. NGOs) to define the agenda and themes of WSIS. Most recently, the third PrepCom meeting was held during 15-26 September 2003, which worked on, among other things, finalising the draft Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action for the approval in the Geneva WSIS.

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Reference

1. Website of the World Summit on Information Society, www.itu.int/wsis/.