



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
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Subject: UNESCO translating the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
Declaration and Plan of Action into concrete Actions
Freedom of Expression in Cyberspace

Dear Sir/Madam,

UNESCO has, from the very outset of the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society, been vigorously defending the free flow of information and opinion by word and by picture. Freedom of expression, press freedom and the right to information have been at the core of the Organisation's effort and will continue to be so during the second phase of the Summit and beyond.

The universal principle of freedom of expression as it is laid down in Article 19 of the Universal declaration of Human Rights states "freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" is an underpinning principle for the vast volume of concrete development activities UNESCO has engaged in to translate the WSIS Declaration into concrete results. Whether we speak of education, promotion of cultural and linguistical diversity, science or communication and information, the principle of freedom of expression must be applied. To ensure this, UNESCO will continue to raise awareness of freedom of expression and to engage in advocacy when this freedom is being curtailed.

This will be done through the continued expansion of the IFEX (International Freedom of Expression Exchange) press freedom monitoring network, which, with assistance from UNESCO, will be able to focus more of its efforts on media on the Internet. The continued establishment of Chairs in Freedom of Expression is another concrete measure to ensure that capacity building for knowledge about freedom of expression is delivered in an ever larger number of Member States. Furthermore, UNESCO will support training activities (including e-learning) and awareness

raising campaigns in Africa, the Middle East and the Arab world, and Latin America. These campaigns will target media and information professionals, politicians and representatives from the judiciary as well as the general audience. In the Arab world for example there will be a television campaign leading up to the celebration of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May with the help of “comic strip jingles”, carrying an easily understandable version of the principles of freedom of expression.

Creating a legislative framework conducive to freedom of expression is a key element in establishing a true enabling environment for the people targeted by the WSIS activities in the developing countries. In several countries, UNESCO will offer its assistance to governments to develop concrete legislation. A new law has just been put in place in Afghanistan and there are concrete plans for Liberia, Sudan, and Ethiopia.

Furthermore, the WSIS process has cast new light on the freedom of expression in Cyberspace. UNESCO is of the fundamental belief that the new digital media and the Internet should be allowed the same freedom as traditional media. There are no reasons whatsoever to establish new and more restrictive regulatory systems. On the contrary, it is the very spirit of Cyberspace itself, that allows for more information to be widely communicated faster and cheaper than any other medium known.

In the preparatory phase of the Geneva Summit, UNESCO organised an electronic forum to discuss the challenges for freedom of expression in Cyberspace and during the Summit, a special symposium was held which focused on the many aspects of this issue. Furthermore we organised a seminar in cooperation with the French National Commission on freedom of expression in the Information Society. As one of the immediate results of these activities, the Organisation will, this spring, publish a study on “Politics of the Information Society: The Bordering and Chilling of Global Data Flows”. This book analyzes in detail subjects such as Jurisdiction and the Information Society, Censorship and Surveillance, Filters and Blocking, and Privacy.

To follow up on this report, UNESCO’s Sector for Communication and Information will host a major international conference next spring that will investigate in depth these challenges by bringing together media professionals, academics and policy makers.

Please accept, Sir/Madam, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Abdul Waheed Khan