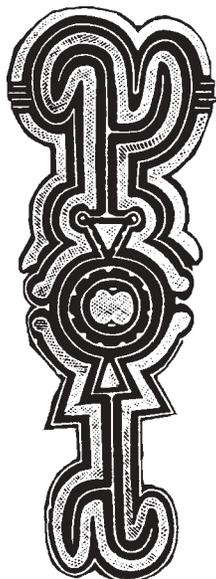


**Other side
of the divide** Latin-American
and Caribbean
Perspectives on the WSIS





agence intergouvernementale
de la francophonie

Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie

This brochure has been produced thanks to the financial support of the "Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie" (the AIF - <http://agence.francophonie.org>), an organization who works for peace, democracy and human rights and that focus the sustainable development and the access to the information within a frame of respect of the linguistic and cultural diversity. The support, managed through its "Institut francophone des nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la formation" (INTIF) (<http://intif.francophonie.org/>), covers the translations of articles, the edition, the press and the diffusion of the brochure as well as the creation of the Web site associate (<http://www.redistic.org/folieto-cmsi>).

The Francophonie has been the promoter of a effort of collaboration of several organizations of the french speaking, spanish speaking and portugues speaking worlds establishing an alliance to accept the challenges raised by the information society in relation to the cultural diversity. The project Three Linguistic Spaces (<http://www.3el.org/>) is an innovating environment of reinforcement for the design of new strategies of international cooperation to reinforce, through the dialogue between the cultures, the construction of a peace culture, one of whose main values it is the respect by the differences.

Also Francophonie has contributed to the World Summit on the Information Society (<http://smsi.francophonie.org/>) and, in complement to its intergovernmental role (see the contributions for the Summit products of the Inter-ministerial Conference of Rabat in http://www.francophonie.org/documents/pdf/declarations/declaration_rabat_esp.pdf) has supported to the participation of actors and actresses of the civil society to the different stages of the Summit.

Publication of the "Network on the Social Impact of the Information and Communication Technologies" (**RedISTIC**)

<http://redistic.org>

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APC is an international network of civil society organisations dedicated to empowering and supporting groups and individuals working for peace, human rights, development and protection of the environment, through the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the Internet.

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Funredes is a Non-Governmental Organization, dedicated to the dissemination of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in developing countries, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the objective of contributing to regional development and integration. This is done in collaboration with international organizations, NGO's, the States and public or private institutions.

<http://funredes.org>

INFOPOLIS

The Research Program on Information Society (INFOPOLIS), Research Institute Germani, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires, works on several issues related to Information Society: e-government, e-politics, ICT and development, indicators on Information Society for Latin America and the Caribbean, social appropriation of ICTs, telecentres, community networks, etc.

<http://www.fsoc.uba.ar/invest/iigg/index.htm>



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With our commitment to poverty reduction, environmental conservation and technology choice we think ITDG is uniquely placed to contribute to a world free of poverty.

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Red de Información para el Tercer Sector

RITS is a non-profit organization whose mission is to strengthen civil society organizations through the strategic use of ICT. Its main lines of action include qualified information on the third sector, democratic access to the ICT and knowledge management, promotes and offers support for articulating networks and develops activities of lobbying and advocacy looking for the promotion of policies and projects for the infoinclusion.

<http://www.rits.org.br>

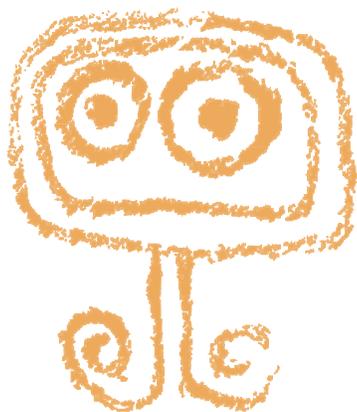


Universidad Bolivariana de Chile

The "Internet and Society" Program of the Bolivarian University of Chile has as objective to contribute to the formulation of public policies to assure the access, use and social appropriation of the Internet by the public sector, the private sector and the civil society. All this in order to maximize the social welfare and the sustainable development. It develops activities oriented to feed the debate on the impact on the Internet in the Society, to develop capacities to make the social appropriation possible of the Internet, and to design and to execute pilot projects to facilitate learning processes and to replicate the successful practices.

<http://www.ubolivariana.cl/>

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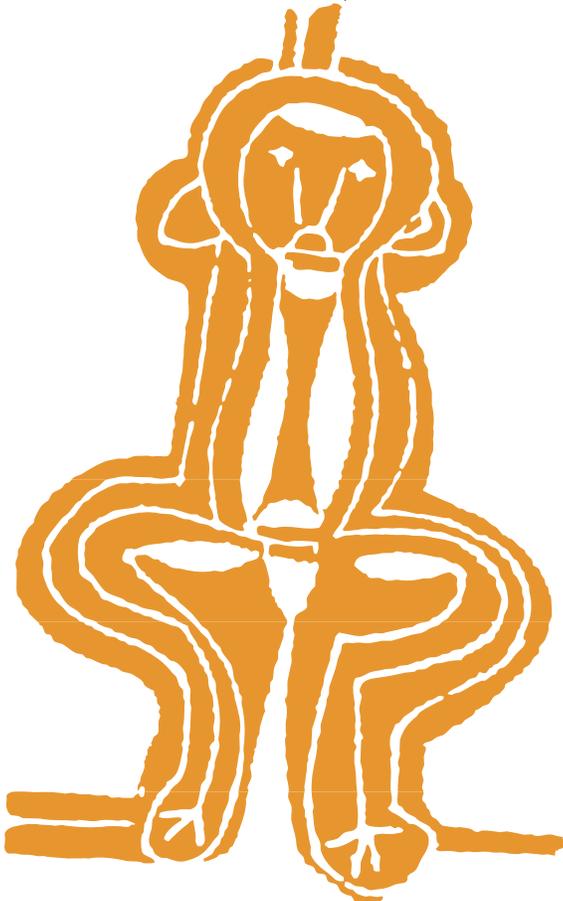
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Declaration of *somos@telecentros* for World Summit on the Information Society

Interin Comitee
somos@telecentros
April 2003

The participants of II the Regional Meeting of *somos@telecentros*, celebrated between the 9th and 11th of April of 2003, in Quito, Ecuador;

Considering that the mission of *somos@telecentros* establishes that it is need to generate and to strengthen, from Latin America and the Caribbean, a human network, based on solidarity, communicative, democratic and participative that generates policies based on the principles of respect to cultural, linguistic and ethnic, ideological, generational and fair to gender considerations and it stimulates the use and social appropriation of the information and communication technologies by the different actors, organizations, social movements, communities and citizen networks, generating and endorsing the processes towards a sustainable, real and equitable development of the society by means of a global movement of communitarian telecentres;



Participating in the preparatory process towards the World Summit on the Information Society, that it will be carried out in Geneva 2003 and Tunisia 2005; and starting off of the fact that we are organizations and individual with trajectory in the work for the human development, supported by ICT, and that for that reason we have meaningful experiences and knowledge;

We point out the following:

We think it is necessary to open and to stimulate participative debates and critical analytical reflections on the concept and the nature of the information society.

That, only the strengthening of the local capacities will allow inclusive processes to attend the necessities and demands of the communities and the active participation of these communities in the course that takes the Society.

That, it is necessary to promote continuous learning processes on ICT for the development of capacities on the individuals and communities in order to manage the appropriate use of the ICT as tools to solve their problems, to fortify local identities and cultures and to satisfy real necessities.

We think that it is required the fortification of capacities and skills so that the people may develop and share useful contents by themselves, which serve to satisfy their necessities and to improve their quality of life.

We maintain, that the topic of access extends the borders of the connectivity, the ICT infrastructure and the ICT itself.

We maintain, that the access and appropriation of the information are a requirement for the development and freedom of the individuals.

We believe in the necessity of promoting local processes of technological innovation.

The initiatives arisen from the civil society in relation to public policies and regulatory frames should be considered. Specially those that look for an integral solution and are not biased to a particular topic.

We thought that it is necessary the formulation, discussion, implementation and development of transversal public and/or private policies, locals, nationals, regional and supra-regional, with participation of the different social actors, who guarantee the attainment of all the mentioned aspects.

World summit on the information society seen from the field: Do we enter the play or do we criticize from outside?

DANIEL PIMIENTA

Several years ago I was invited to a workshop at the United Nations University (UNU), in Maastricht, which had gathered some 80 executives of the South and the North, decision-makers of governments, academy and civil society. The topic was the building of networks in the South. Those were the heroic ages to create networks, when the leadership and the capacity of mobilization did more than the budgets; but, at the same moment, many telematic networks of the civil society were asphyxiated by lack of resources, in spite of the heroes.

At one point, the discussion got centered in how to initiate a research and development network in Burkina Faso. There were some colleagues from this African country who listened to the good advices coming from everyone, and of course, from the representatives of international organizations in the North. The discussion extended by more than one hour. I could read the perplexity that marked their faces and I could not prevent myself to think about the two networks that we were managing at that same moment (REDID in Dominican Republic and REHRED in Haiti), which had been made with very limited budgets and much tenacity. We dreamed about having a single support of 40KUS\$ for each one, to assure their progresses and to have a glimpse of some sustainable form to grow. I certainly knew that with that amount the evolution of those projects would change radically. But we could not get that support (or we did not know how to get it).

“We do not have less capacity than those giving us advice”, I thought to myself, “we did not need so many patronizing opinions, the South has as many people able to develop project as the North has: we only need the financial support and we will know what to do.” Surely then, the experts of Burkina Faso, educated in France, were thinking something close to my thoughts. But they listened with patience.

I was getting frantic and to dissipate my discomfort I began to calculate the direct and indirect costs of that meeting to which I had been invited, in a “business class” flight, to spend one week in the pretty city of

Maastricht. First, I calculated the average costs of tickets, hotels and per diems, I multiplied them by 80 and divided them by the number of hours of the meeting (direct costs). Then I computed one week of wage of the people there. I reached a direct cost per hour of the order of 20.000 US\$ and an indirect cost of the order of 5.000 US\$.

I asked the permission to speak and I declared something like: “I am a player from the field; I have created two national networks, with an investment inferior to 40.000 US\$ in both cases. With the same amount of money we could today transform those projects into a reality. I have calculated that the two hours of discussion which we used in search of helping the friends from Burkina Faso to construct their network cost 50.000 US\$. I wonder if it would not have been more efficient to support them with that amount of money instead of inviting them to listen to our advices”. My declaration left a very cold atmosphere in the room, some smiles hardly repressed in the (few) people from the field present and many hard faces. And I thought “This people will never invite me again”.

It was natural that my intervention could seem as a bad taste provocation and, to be frank, much worse examples had occurred at that time, taking into account that the UNU is an academic instance and then not oriented towards the action. A perfect example was a meeting organized in the Caribbean at the same time where experts from international organizations were discussing the kind of networks required in that region without taking the annoyance to invite the people who were sweating hard, constructing networks in trenches, with their energy and faith as their unique resource.

Now, would you imagine how much is going to cost the World Summit on the Information Society, with his more than 20 preparatory meetings to arrive to the big meeting of Geneva and then Tunisia! It's not about mobilizing 80 people but many thousands instead! Imagine what the actors from the field could do with those resources. Or better do not imagine it...

In fact, I had suggested years ago a simple rule that could solve the apparent contradictions of that type of meetings, supposedly addressed to establish strategies for the action. Something very simple but revolutionary. To fix some sort of tax of the order of 10% of the

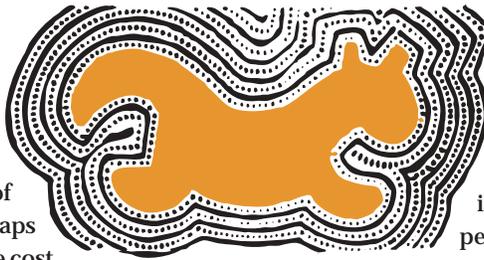
amount of the direct costs of such meetings. The amount could go into a common box which could be returned to the field actors corresponding to the thematic/region of the meeting, by means of an open and transparent contest. Perhaps with an additional 5% we could cover the cost of management and follow up of a contest of this nature. I have suggested this measure to the people of the Civil Society Secretary of the Summit and they seemed interested again. Let's hope they can put in practice that principle of justice and common sense.

Then, what to do? To participate or not to participate? To protest that the money is being invested in words instead of acts? To take the risk of serving as an alibi for decisions remote from our will? To fail to take advantage of the opportunity to impact the global, regional, national agendas on behalf of the importance of the local? To see the occasion to articulate the local with the global and showcase the progresses we have made in the field? To deal with this Summit as another typical event of the United Nations, where the civil society gains presence, after Rio (ecology) and Beijing (gender), and must organize itself to present a coordinated? Or, to insist that, by an elementary sense on coherence, it has to be conceived and acted with another paradigm, inspired on the power of the virtual communities, that has been allowed by the social appropriation of the ICT? Finally, can we imagine a meeting that is going to discuss the bases of a new society, leaving to the governments and the private sector the exclusive right to make proposals? What sense would have a debate on the new social paradigm without the actors of the civil society?

They are questions very difficult to answer individually, and even more collectively; so I do not try here to give the answers.

In fact, the NGO where I belong has accepted a limited budget, from IDRC, to catalyze a work of collective reflection in the Mistica virtual community in relation with the Summit. By accepting, we have skipped the stage of answering to those questions and we got into the action, or rather in the research-action, which is our natural working atmosphere.

For that reason I participated in the first precom meeting in Geneva, accepted the unexpected and late invitation to occupy the chair reserved to the civil society in the inauguration table and could use the established 7 minutes with a communication, in Spanish (I was the only one of the table who did not made his/her speech in English) and presenting a vision from the field, in the South. The communication is available in the web site of the Summit in <http://www.itu.int/wsris> or on the Funredes web site.



Then, what we are going to do and how it is possible to be articulated with other initiatives?

The philosophy behind our intervention is coherent with our nature, vision, and perspective. Nature of facilitator and articulator within the experimentation of an appropriate and social minded use of the ICT; vision of the importance of respecting the plurality and the diversity of the civil society; perspective towards a participative democracy based on the new tools provided by ICT. The coherence principle leads us to acknowledge the importance of the quality of the participative process, above everything else. The same coherence forces us to try to maintain, within this plurality, articulation levels which include gateways towards other initiatives. If the civil society is able to show its knowledge in an integrated and plural manner, then it will demonstrated in this Summit that it has a greater capacity to design the society of tomorrow society than the "representative" actors. Of course, this is not a small challenge.

Our intention is to facilitate, from the distance, the presence of the voice of the people who think and act collectively within Mistica virtual community and who constitute a meaningful segment of the actors of the field of our region (academics and activists). The method will be the same we already used to create collectively with the members of this community (see for example, the last one named "Working the Internet with a social vision").

We are going to propose the construction of two documents with this method:

- One short that tries to be an acid deconstruction of the fashionable concept of "digital divide";
- Other, that would try to shape a vision, surely utopist, of a new society that we names "the utopist of the information", to play with the words.

I say "to propose" because, as you know, the virtual communities by themselves decide what they want or not to undertake. So Funredes will propose and Mistica will decide.

If you have curiosity and you wish to know where is going to lead us this "utopia", or better if you want to participate in its construction, come along within the community, you are welcome.

To conclude, a possible answer for the dilemma of participation in the Summit could be to undertake actions within communities with the confidence that, finally, those actions can serve ourselves independantly of the possibilities that they could serve this Summit or that this Summit does not serve our interests.

World Summit on the Information Society: Is the outcome a foregone conclusion?

PAULO LIMA

1. Cyranek, Gunther "The view of Unesco on the Information Society". Available at the site (Portuguese): <http://www.ip.pbh.gov.br/revista0301/ip0301cyraneck.pdf>

2. World Summit on the Information Society, Dec., 2001, ITU / UN – disclosure document–

The construction of the Information Society shall be on the agenda in 2003, and a set of meetings will be initiated which are decisive for the World Summit on the Information Society.

The meeting was first planned on December 21 2001, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/56/183 which endorsed the framework of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The preparation and planning of the Summit, which was convened under the patronage of the General Secretary of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, is being undertaken by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and other interested UN agencies and by the host countries themselves.

The Summit is ratified by Resolution 73, which was issued by the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, under which consultation took place between UN agencies and the need to hold a World Summit on the Information Society was established. At a meeting in 2001, the council of the ITU approved the realization of this Summit, which shall be held in two phases: In Geneva, Switzerland from December 10 to 12, 2003 and in Tunis, Tunisia in 2005.

The Summit shall address a broad range of themes concerning the Information Society and, as a consequence thereof, common goals and a deeper understanding of the transformation of the society are envisaged. The Summit is expected to adopt a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action to facilitate the effective development of the Information Society and help combat 'info-exclusion'. It therefore involves the assembly of representatives of governments, the private sector, the civil society and non-governmental organizations. It will be a unique opportunity for the global community to consider and take part in the establishment of goals for the construction of the Information Society.

Creating infrastructure

- The role of telecommunications, investment and technology in creating the infrastructure of the Information Society and reducing the digital divide.

Open Doors

- Disseminate universal and equal access to the Information Society
- Meet the requirements of developing countries
- Information being treated as a common public resource.

Services and applications

- Effects of the Information Society on economic, social and cultural development
- Effects of the Information Society on the world of science

User requirements

- Protection, privacy and consumer rights
- Appropriate content which reflects cultural diversity and the entitlement to communication
- The Ethics of the Information Society
- User Training
- Protection and privacy in the workplace

Developing global standards

- The roles of the governments, the private sector and civil society in standardizing the Information Society
- Information as a common public resource (information in the public domain)
- Intellectual property rights and exceptions established by law
- Freedom of expression
- Policies concerning telecommunications charges and Internet access

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and education

- ICT as a lever for educational change
- The teaching area: ICT, teachers, students and content
- The requirements of today's worker

What kind of Information Society do we want?

The expression 'Information Society' refers to a kind of social and economic development by which the acquisition, storage, processing, recognition, transmission, distribution and dissemination of information leads to the creation of knowledge and the meeting of the requirements of individuals and companies, performing a central role in economic activity, the creation of wealth, the definition of the quality of life of individuals and their cultural practices. The information society therefore equates to a society which functions by increasing reliance on digital informa-



tion networks. This change to the domain of economic activity and the factors determining social welfare arises from the development of new information, audiovisual and communication technologies, including the important ramifications and impacts on the education, science, health, leisure, transportation and the environment sectors, amongst other sectors.

Active social acceptance is important if these changes are to be successful. It is essential that equal access is created to the benefits generated and that the factors which lead to new forms of exclusion from knowledge - info-exclusion, be combated simultaneously. It is fundamental to further strengthen social cohesion and cultural diversity, equal opportunities in different regions, encourage the participation by individuals in community life and provide a State which is more open and democratic in identifying the problems and solutions in the public interest

The information society must be a society for all. The political measures for constructing the information society must contain provisions so that all individuals have the opportunity to participate in it and therefore benefit from the advantages provided by this development of civilization. In order to achieve this, it is essential that all individuals are able to obtain the

necessary qualifications for enjoying a natural and “friendly” relationship with information technologies. It is also essential for people to be able to access the technologies in public places, without facing obstacles of a financial nature (free public community internet access centers). These centers must help overcome the initial difficulties faced by people who are currently excluded from these possibilities. Nevertheless, making the society of the future more democratic shall only take place when it is possible for most people in society to have access to information technologies and possess the real skills to use them. Should this not occur, it could become a powerful factor of social exclusion.

A potential contradiction is inherent in the information society – giving value to the human factor in the productive process, by transforming knowledge and information into capital, whilst simultaneously disqualifying the new individuals who are – “illiterate” in information technology terms, which may lead to a new class of excluded individuals.” The Information Society which we desire and strive towards is aware of these pitfalls and challenges. The time is upon us to leave our mark on the present through effective and transforming proposals, to highlight the abusive ex-

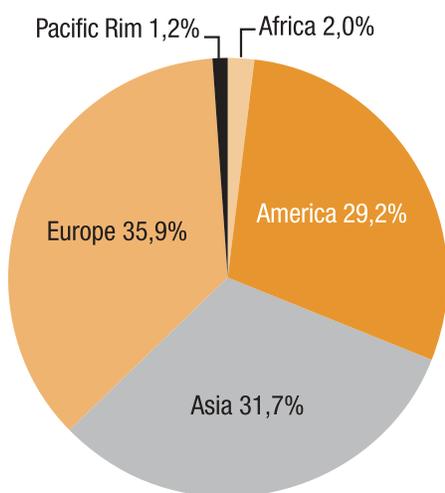
ploitation regarding internet access costs in developing countries and to discuss funds and long-term proposals for combating info-exclusion.

Challenges for developing countries

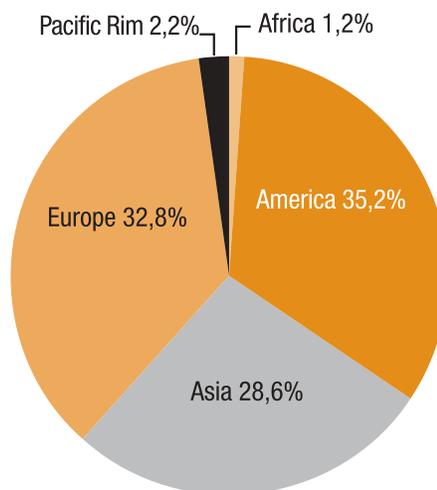
“A open and universal Information Society can only develop and subsist if it is based upon fundamental principles of policy which are understood by all. Universal access to all new information and media services is believed by many to be the most important of the principles and this is implicitly incorporated into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially in article 19 which addresses freedom of expression, and in article 27, concerning the freedom of access to information and the protection of the security and privacy of users¹.”

Rits, in conjunction with the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (ABONG) has been taking part in several rounds of preparatory discussions and is already in a position to evaluate three important issues not incorporated in the preparation for this Summit.” “In the run up to PrepCom II (the preparatory meeting held from February 17 to 28 in Geneva) it is imperative to bring up these issues, explain them and be prepared for the debate, as it has been announced that there will be a powerful presence of developed countries and solidly aligned large corporations. After analysis of the distribution of resources of the Information Society throughout the world, the Summit document of disclosure², presents the following graphs:

Fixed telephone lines (one billion)



Estimated number of Internet users (350 million)



It can be readily seen from the graphs that simplifying the distribution using an exclusively geographical criteria has seriously distorted the analysis.

It is not possible to work with the concepts set forth above (equal and fair distribution of resources) by grouping together the countries composing North America (namely the USA and Canada) and the countries composing Latin America. This analysis fundamentally undermines the construction of a proposal for an Information Society including the developing countries.

Another matter of importance is the complete lack of reference to Portuguese as a working language for the Summit. There are 175 million of us in Brazil who shall no have no access to documents in our own language, meaning we would have to read documents in French, English or Spanish. The proposals which the Brazilian government is going to put forward at the Summit have not yet been made widespread. Brazil plays a central role, due to its long tradition and leadership amongst developing countries in United Nation's discussions.

For this and many other reasons, a wide-reaching debate is justified amongst governments at all levels, companies and NGOs in order to collectively put together proposals for the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. We run the risk of watching from afar as a World Summit on the Information Society of wealthy nations unfolds...

We must debate about the right to communication with open mindness

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November 2002

MARCO NAVAS-ALVEAR

Phase one of the WSIS is approaching and one of the most expected outcomes is a declaration about the human rights related to communication.

Within this framework, rises the debate about the concept and contents of a **right to communication**. However it worries that part of this debate is being originated from partial visions that could lead to poor results. Thus it is specially disturbing such a little discussion of this subject from a Latin American perspective.

Considering that we want to put forward some elements we hope will contribute to the thinking and to stimulate a deeper and more comprehensive discussion. With it we also make a call to approach the subject with open mindness and from every possible angle.

Antecedents

Proposed for the very first time by Jean D Arcy in late 60s within the context of, at that time, increasing debate about a new international order in communication, the subject of a **right to communication** still results as an unfinished and innovative idea facing the traditional ways of thinking about the rights in the field of communication.

The basic approach of D'Arcy is summarized in these words: "Today it seems possible to take an step forward: the right for mankind to the communication, as a result of our last victories against time and space, as well as our greater awareness of the communication phenomena. This fundamental right was implicit and underlying since the origins in all conquered freedoms, such as the ones related to opinion, speech, press and information. The introduction of machines, which stand in between people, made us forget it existence. Today we realize that this right encompass all freedoms, but, also, provides both for individuals and societies, the notions of access and participation to the information and bilateral flow of information, notions all necessary, as we well understand now, for the harmonious development of man and mankind".¹

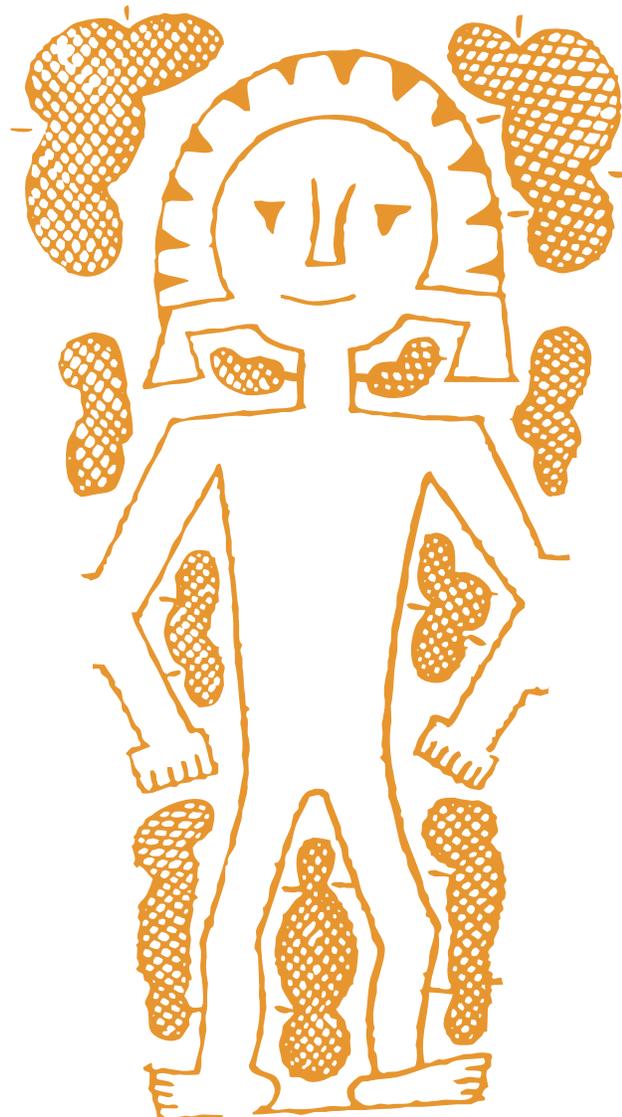
The question to which these words take us is whether the current assumptions of the Human Rights about communication are or are not the best suited

to embrace communication as an interactive, bi or multilateral process as well as dialogue one.

As an answer to this question it has been considered the need to build a new right that in order to be formally acknowledged will have to go through a long process.

The problem just lies in that the right to communication is at the present time more than a well defined right, as we have previously highlighted, a **disciplinary field** from which to discuss and understand the impacts that phenomena as digitalization and convergence of the information and communication

¹ Cfr. "Citizen initiatives for the right to communication", in Chasqui, Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación, N. 64, Quito, CIESPAL, Dec. 1998, p. 30.



technologies and even mass media have produced on social life and people in their everyday life.

In this sense the reflective task just advances and there are reasonable doubts whether it will be on time for the World Summit on the Information Society in order to make a Declaration on the Right to Communication.

Facing this it is not to be forgotten that the traditional freedom of speech and information have the advantage of being acknowledged as fundamental rights within the main international instruments of Human Rights as in practically any constitution worldwide.

Some reasons

Until now much reflection to this matter has been oriented to build a **new right to communication**, to some, radically different to the freedom of speech and communication. A right that departs from existent rights. On the same line, authors like Antonio Pascual, for example reflect on this subject insinuating the need for a radical divide between the old communicational rights –the freedom- and the new right.²

Nonetheless his arguing, at least from the human rights is debatable. Does not take into consideration the advances as to how demanding are the already existent rights and their possibilities of assigning new outreaches according to the current times. From the sense that the quoted author gives to his thinking this is not possible. Nor it takes in consideration the systemic character of human rights that makes them to be seen as a whole –a comprehensive corpus-.³

Having said so, the new concept of the right to communication, quite to the contrary of what some analysts think, **it should not aim to substitute** the previous notions but to try to **integrate** them within an integral and interactive view of the communication as a process on meanings interchanges.

Some analysis based on lack of continuity and opposition between freedom of speech and the new right to information might lead to a **wrong strategy** in which sectors of civil society bet all in favor on acknowledging the new right and overlook some other fields for action. In this context the question is: ¿What shall we do until the new right becomes admitted?”

There is no strong reason in order to avoid seeing continuity on the rights as a result of an historic evolution of the international standards of protection of human rights.

In spite of having emerged in previous historic contexts: that of the western bourgeois revolutions (XVIII Century) in the case of freedom of speech, and that of the postwar (XX Century) in the case of the freedom of

information; these concepts are permanently reviewed due to the fact that social groups apply pressure in order to give them new outreaches. A sample of this is the relatively recent *Declaration of Principles about Freedom of Speech* of the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, which assigns new outreaches to this right in this case acknowledged in the Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights.

Then why overlook existent rights instead of seen them as opportunities for action. Adopting the existent rights as a way to fight for widening the right to communication, much depends of –as Buenaventura de Souza Santos would say- the “alternative use” that one could apply to these concepts and to the ability of the social actors to consider new meanings from this concepts, to describe again–wording of R. Rorty in his *Irony, Contingence and Solidarity*- or if you want to rewrite and signify again categories such as “freedom of information” or of “expression”.

Thus we recommend

an heterodox strategy, not of a radical negation or blocking the legitimacy of admitted rights aiming to invent a new one, task which otherwise proves to be illusory.

The great challenge is at the same time to pursue fighting from admitted rights descending from the philosophical to concrete proposals related to this right to communication. This work is being done by many individuals, organizations and faculty interested in this theme from several perspectives and with different intensities.

The problem also implies to articulate the conceptual basis of the right to communication with the contents. Until now many papers emphasize over the complexity of the subject and by means of a philosophical rhetoric try to point out the importance of a new right to the communication, trying out definitions of a formal kind. That not lacking in importance must lead to a more technical definition about which are the specific rights to the communication that still are not considered from this interactive perspective and dialogue that the communication is all about.

Some recent papers have centered its attention on this effort of precision, pretending to integrate elements of the previous rights –already admitted- with the new rights on the subject of communication. Thus for example the project of the *Declaration on the Right to Communication* by Cees Hamelink that proposes as key elements in this field some already existent as rights, grouping them into rights of information; cultural; of protection; collectives and participation.⁴

2. Cfr. “Brief reasoned glossary of the Communication and Information for the understanding and to better understand oneself”. Doc. Caracas, March 2003.

3. See Systematic Course on Human Rights in www.iepala.es

4. See www.crisinfo.org

The international law is a “living process” has said Cees Hamelink, when responding to the criticisms about his document formulated by the organization” *Article 19*.⁵ This statement may have in our opinion at least two implications: the first one is that from the already admitted rights it might be possible to advance in a task of giving wider meanings in order to allow the viewing and protection of the field of the communication; and the second one would be to develop the slower process of introducing some specific new rights that have to be in harmony with the already existent.

The question is if these two implications refer to antagonist options or one could well choose a strategy that integrates them. We consider that the above mentioned antagonism is irrelevant to the need of integrating the two perspectives. That is possible if a good technical effort of defining rights is done.

Working without providing a solid definition of the right of communication or as Hamelink has done, according to the criticism of

Article 19, proposing concrete contents but constituting nothing but a repetition of texts over already admitted rights, or even worse, with novel formulations but that affect ancient rights such as freedom of speech, are all alternatives that might lead to a serious deterioration in the status of the subject rather than an effective end result.

As far as the criticism to the Hamelink document we agree a great deal with the first formulated by *Article 19*. Hamelink in a recent appearance has not refuted the argument that his document duplicates formulations of already existent rights and does it in a polemic fashion, although he has stated that it represents some kind of first try and as such it is perfectible. He has said

also something rather important: that the right to communication might become the “umbrella” groups all related rights. Idea with which we agree.

Therefore we insist and particularly from a Latin American perspective that it is possible to strengthen the already admitted rights and at the same time to put forward proposals of specific contents about the new rights of communication that have to do with real needs of access, participation, use and empowerment of ICT within the context of the Information Society. Then we proceed with the best way to enunciate these needs as rights but also with harmonizing these very novel concepts with the already existent rights.

In addition, from an strategic point of view we must continue the restating or rewriting efforts in order to outreach the protection that can be demanded based on traditional rights, mainly through the introduction of suits and petitions and working closer with courts and judges, plus actions of knowledge and socialization. These are aspects not to be overlooked.

More than overcoming these barriers, the important thing about the work of a really comprehensive and systemic approach of rights lies in facing a “real policy” of governments and international ruling organizations that privilege economic growth over human needs, and in starting to promote a notion of human dignity in an information society with freedom, but at the same time with justice and solidarity.

In summary, working from the existent does not exclude looking for new concepts in order to assume them and claim them as rights. There is no contradiction between these two tasks. This is a more realistic view and it is urgent to support it from a Latin American perspective.

⁵ See criticisms by Article 19 in www.article19.org/1512.doc, and the responses by Hamelink in [//ac.derechos.org/wsis](http://ac.derechos.org/wsis)

Latin America gearing up for the World Summit on the Information Society: national processes reports

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1. The complete report is
in: <http://lac.derechos.apc.org/whsis/cdocs.shtml?x=91122>.

2. The full report is
available at: <http://lac.derechos.apc.org/whsis/cdocs.shtml?x=9827>

At the end of 2002 and beginning of 2003, APC member organizations in Argentina (Wamani), Ecuador (EcuaneX) and Mexico (LaNeta), and friend organizations in Dominican Republic (Funredes) and Bolivia (CRISBOL) held consultation, reflection, debate and action around national interests, needs and visions for the construction and/or development of the so called "information societies". The process was also oriented to help civil society groups to reflect on and get involved in the process leading up to the WSIS which will take place in Geneva in December 2003 and Tunisia in 2005.

This document presents the most relevant aspects of the national journeys developed in the occasion of the WSIS. The methodologies applied in each country were different: Wamani interviewed electronically civil society, academics and government key actors; EcuaneX, CRISBOL and Funredes organized multi-stakeholder meetings and workshops; and, LaNeta worked based on the review of secondary sources (institutional web sites, documents, initiatives, among others) and a discussion forum. Any of the reports that presents the results of the national processes pretend to reflect the civil society position as a whole, but they provide a picture of the situation, trends and visions of a significant number of actors.

Argentina ¹

The absence of a policy (or the policy of not having policies) has determined the logical redundancies as well as the important absences, in despite of the ICT and the information society programs and initiatives. Wamani came up with interesting conclusions from the interviews to actors of different social actors and the critical analysis of the national ICT and information society policies and initiatives: the technological agenda is linked to the general policy of the Argentinean State. This general policy has driven the country, in the last years, to experiment a severe process of des-articulation of the social contract and to the increment of poverty indexes. Therefore, the definition of ICT and information society policies goes by the redefinition of the general economic and po-

litical rules, in the perspective of incorporating the diversity of social actors, especially those that have been absent: academia and the associative sector. In relation to the WSIS, the particular demand from the NGOs is related to the implementation of virtual mechanisms to enlarge civil society organizations participation.

Bolivia ²

Bolivia is taking back an urgent and necessary debate. Years of rich and concrete communication experiences are the base for the discussion and that open the opportunity for the country to contribute substantively in the continental scenario. The Bolivian CRIS Platform, the national chapter of the global CRIS Campaign, developed two national meetings (between October 2, 2002 and 22 January, 2003) oriented to the collective definition of the direction that the Information Society will take in Bolivia. One of the most relevant achievements of the process is to have reached agreements and consensus with the government around information society key issues and aspects. This agreement was the base for the definition of the Bolivian position for the WSIS Latin American and the Caribbean Regional Conference. The following are the agreed aspects:

- The information and communication society should be based on communication as a Universal Human Right. The design and implementation of the general and specific strategies are a shared responsibility between the government, the private sector and the civil society.
- The communication and information media should be in function of the strengthening of the local identities and capacities (rural, peri-urban and urban) for the human participatory and sustainable development. They should address the integration of all regions, differentiating the diverse technical platforms according with the local and regional needs.
- To implement new information and communication technologies to respond to the sustainable human development process, it is necessary to consider five criteria: social appropriation, local content production, use and application of appropriate technologies, convergence of new and traditional technologies and pertinence of languages and cultures.
- The technological platforms should be all those al-

low the satisfaction of the different social needs in terms of communication and information: radio, rural telephony, television, video, Internet, satellite, etc.

- Besides the importance of training in the use of technical platforms, it is fundamental the training oriented to the appropriation and interpretation of communication and information content according with sustainable and participatory human development processes.
- The generation of economic sustainable processes is a collective responsibility of all the sectors (government, private and civil society). Allocation and implementation of financial resources should be transparent and it must involve to all stakeholders based on strategies, action plans (in short, medium and long term) elaborated in a participatory way.

It was not possible to reach agreement in relation to the following aspect:

- Through an appropriate legal framework, the government should guarantee the right to communicate for all social actors. This implies to promote the access and the use of content and information and communication tools. In addition, it is related to create policies and laws around the right to produce and own content and media, incorporating criteria of plurality.

Dominican Republic ³

In January 2003, Funredes led the realization of an informative and reflective meeting for civil society about the national wagers in relation to the WSIS. The objective of the meeting was to inform and stimulate key civil society actors about the implications of the social changes brought by the information and communication technologies and the preparation process towards the WSIS.

The conclusion of the journey pointed to recognize that at public level there is the decision to prioritize the information society issue in the agenda. There is a variety of running initiatives and programs in relation to the ICTs and the information society. However, they are oriented basically to assure access and infrastructure. The consideration of the methodological aspects for the implementation of the programs, the vision of the ICTs strategic appropriation as tools for development and the training for content production, is absent.

In relation to the level of engagement and understanding of the ICTs and information society related aspects by civil society organizations, the conclusion that those are topics that are not part of the collective agenda and that an intensive and continuous working process to promote proactive participation is

3. The full report is available at: <http://lac.derechos.apc.org/wsis/cdocs.shtml?x=9826>



needed. There is a valuable accumulated potential in civil society organizations and NGOs that have years of experience in the field of ICTs and the information society. They can be key for the development of information, training, promotion of active civil society participation processes.

Additional conclusions point the importance of the use of the term “information societies” in the “understanding that each society should define and build an information society according with its socio-economic, political and cultural reality and design it based on its development and human integral evolution ideals”. In relation to the social wagers involved in the construction of the information societies, access, contents and applications should be articulated with a process of building capacities in the use of ICTs and the understanding of its implications, impacts and challenges at social, economic, political and cultural levels. The necessity of putting the digital divide issue in its fair dimension, means to see it as a consequence and reflection of the social structural gaps and, therefore, subordinated to them. Very closed related to this issue it is the digital inclusion one and the need of a networking culture development in the perspective of assuring the “real and effective participation through open, transparent and plural processes in which democracy and respect to the diversity would be a practiced by the majority”.

Speak about information societies is speak about new paradigms and social organization forms, of appropriation of technologies and its impact in social relations. Speak, therefore, about the culture, languages, education and empowerment of social groups. The intrinsic relation between the social and the technological demands a meaningful use of the technological tools.

Coordinated participation between the different social actors and the recognition of the inputs that each one can do is determinant for the construction of the information societies. Civil society must generate mechanisms that allow it to organize itself in order to be participative in the process of definition and development of the information societies. To achieve those objectives, is it necessary to make visible the benefits and potentialities of ICTs to improve and enlarge people's life quality. It is also necessary to demonstrate how ICTs can be linked with the priorities agenda of civil society organizations that are focused on poverty reduction and acquisition of basic needs.

The meeting and workshops as well as the promotion, incentive and continuation mechanisms of the process of reflection and action that emerged from them, are oriented to strengthen the “potentialities of

civil society organizations for a proactive participation in the construction of information societies which respond to the Dominican society interest, cultural, economic and socially.

Mexico ⁴

“With wide experience in the use of new technologies and in organizations processes, diverse civil society actors have gotten engaged with the analysis and discussion around communications, media, regulations, access, privacy and other issues that are part of the WSIS framework. In that sense, in November 2002, various organizations agreed to promote an space to support the Mexican civil society movement in the process of being informed and being able to participate strategically in different aspects of the information and communication agenda in the country”. Articulation of ONGs and civil society organizations is also being generated around the information society, communication, its nature and development, based on their experience on the use and promotion of ICTs for the enhancing of collaborative processes and in the search of mechanism to strength the democracy.

“Recently, different civil society organizations are incorporating in their own agendas the promotion and defense of the right to communicate”. They are also incorporating in their field of action and debate topics related to the right to communicate and information democratization. Organizations that are daily working with media are developing proposals oriented to the right to communicate. According to that, they are placed in the framework of the construction of the information and knowledge society”.

In despite of the meaningful advances, it is necessary to enlarge the participation and bring the debate to other civil society groups, such as the indigenous, labor unions, rural organizations, youth groups, women, academia, among others.

A crucial aspect for the development of information societies is the defense and promotion of the communities self-determination capacity: “the communities are the ones to define their own mechanism and projects that allow them to be involved in the information and knowledge society”. Active participation of all stakeholders in the process of design, formulation, monitoring and evaluation of ICTs and information society policies is essential. Additionally, the importance of building consensus and communication strategies between the government and civil society organizations must be highlighted.

The Mexican report provide an exhaustive overview of the different initiatives, programs and actions that

4. The full report is available at: <http://lac.derechos.apc.org/wsis/cdocs.shtml?x=11731>



the public sector, the academia, and the civil society groups are developing in relation to ICTs and the information society.

Ecuador ⁵

For the Ecuadorian case, it is necessary to design a discussion strategy around the priorities in relation to the information society and the right to communicate. A debate and reflection oriented not only to the academic discussion but also to the social change. This is a collective process of all stakeholders, not forgetting the linkage between communication and citizen participation. The challenge is to generate a social debate around those aspects from a national perspective. The current political scenario in Ecuador in which some indigenous and representatives of social movements are participating, offers an opportunity for the construction of civil society mechanisms of incidence in ICT and information society policy processes.

To conclude...

The national meetings and workshops offered an opportunity to bring near civil society groups to the key information society issues, to debate around the already recognized rights related to communication and information, the analysis of its trends as well as to the exchange of information in relation to the communication experiences and the use, appropriation and promotion of ICTs. In the same way, the importance of designing strategies for the continuous collective reflection, discussion and analysis for assuring the incidence on the process of information society development was highlighted.

5. The full report is available at: <http://lac.derechos.apc.org/wsis/cdocs.shtml?x=9874>