Just Net Coalition's statement for the first round of stakeholder consultations of the WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) plus ten review process

Being held in the UN, New York, on 2nd July, 2015

The Just Net Coalition[1] (JNC) comprises several dozen civil society organisations and individuals from different regions globally, concerned with issues of Internet governance, from the perspective of all human rights, including democracy and economic and social justice.

We welcome the plus ten review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and we hope the outcomes of the review will provide new directions to the global community – new directions for using ICTs to empower diverse purposes, at the same time new directions for preventing its harmful use. By harmful uses, we mean not only security threats, but quite particularly negative implications on human rights, equity, social justice and democracy. ICTs have considerably changed the world in the last ten years since WSIS. It is time to take a really deep and critical look at what has changed and how, and at what are our collective political responsibilities in this regard. We refer in this context to our Delhi Declaration, see:

> http://www.justnetcoalition.org/delhi-declaration

ICTs have provided revolutionary new means of communication, of accessing information and for organizing. ICTs are transforming almost every sector. But at the same time, the last decade of widespread ICT absorption in our social structures has also been a decade in which inequality has risen faster than it has in a very long time. Why are the new ICTs, and the Internet, celebrated as egalitarian technologies, when in fact they are not leading to a more equal world? ***There seems to be something not quite right with the current ways of Information Society governance, meaning, the governance frameworks that affect how ICTs impact and transform our social institutions and structures.*** The WSIS plus ten review must examine this key issue. We must rise above a techno-fascinated view, no matter how tempting; we must address the deeper structural and governance questions that face us today regarding how our information society is shaping up.

In this context, with truly a monumental task facing the WSIS plus ten review process, we are very disappointed with the highly truncated nature of that review process. We rue the fact that we will not have a summit level review, with a full preparatory process, like that of the original WSIS (a full process was called for, incidentally, by the developing countries). In this formative stage of a new

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[1] http://justnetcoalition.org

epoch in human history – the advent of an information society – abdication of our governance responsibilities will have ramifications that are also historic. Importantly, the information society is inherently more global than earlier social forms, so there are even more pressing global governance imperatives than ever before – the WSIS plus 10 process must address them. *We see an unfortunate fatigue with global governance, especially in this space where global governance is what we need most. We must rise above this fatigue; we must carry out our political duties in full earnest.*

However. Since the time is really short for this review process, we suggest that we should focus on developing high level principles for information society governance, taking from what was agreed in Tunis. The two phases of WSIS have produced very sound documents. But now it is time to take note of the sometimes-techtonic changes and new developments since 2005. The new high level principles must be clearly and precisely connected to key issues that are most salient and important to the world today. They should provide clear and specific directions for continued, meaningful work in these areas. They should also direct and help us prepare for a full summit level review, in 3-5 years, of the then current context of the information society. *The plus 10 review must call for a full summit in 3-5 years, to review information society governance issues, and to develop the ground for it.*
In that regard.

Information society governance can be seen in two parts, as the original WSIS process partly did. These parts are (1) ICTs for development, which was treated, if rather inadequately, under the 'financing mechanisms' track of WSIS, and (2) global digital architectures, generally, the Internet governance stream.

On the ICT for development side: *UNDP should be given a clear mandate to examine and present key principles and formulations for applying ICTs to the field of development*, said mandate to integrate the principles into its programs, and also UNDP to advise and support national governments and other agencies in this mission. *UNCTAD should be mandated to look at the macro impacts of ICTs on developing economies*, to provide high level principles, and also to advise and help developing countries. Specific standing mandates and programs for these agencies should be instituted by the WSIS review process, along with the needed resources.

On the Internet governance (IG) side: It is urgently required to *develop a new anchor point inside the UN system to address international Internet-related public policies. This is one of the key unfinished agendas from WSIS.* Indeed, the top three priorities identified by the Working Group on Internet Governance, now from more than a decade ago, are still priority issues today: the asymmetric role of the US government, the lack of security, and the high connectivity costs for developing countries. Further, many very important global governance issues have arisen since the WSIS and have become urgent to be addressed, such as: understanding the economics of data and developing appropriate data governance frameworks; regulating Internet platforms and intermediaries; the structural impact of the Internet on key sectors like media, health, education, and agriculture; and the impact on jobs and income-inequality. These are only some of the policy areas.

A high level acceptance of the commitment, along with some basic details, to develop such a new UN-based anchor point, and the required institutional mechanisms, should be negotiated and agreed. The task of implementation of this recommendation should then be handed over to a duly empowered body,

which should report to the UN General Assembly in a time-bound manner.

With regard to the technical management of the Internet, or the ***ICANN*** side of global IG: That should remain fully decentralized while ***strengthening its political accountability and adherence to internationally agreed norms and policies.*** The structure of such governance has to be truly international. ***This is possible only when underwritten by an international treaty***, which preserves the current decentralized forms, at the same time instituting appropriate international oversight.

In this regard we refer to concrete recommendations for an appropriate institutional architecture that the Just Net Coalition provided to the NetMundial Conference. This addresses both the public policies side and the 'ICANN oversight' side: see

http://content.netmundial.br/contribution/democratising-global-governance-of-the-internet/164

We look forward to what we hope is purposive and engaging discussion, and to provide more specific text and recommendations during the plus 10 review process.