

World Summit on the Information Society: Tunis World Summit

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On 17-18 November 2005, the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society was held in Tunis. It followed a previous summit held in Geneva, two years ago (see IRIS 2003-6: 2). Participants representing governments, non-governmental organisations and civil society discussed a number of issues revolving around the world wide web. They focused mainly on internet governance and how fundamental rights such as freedom of expression could be safeguarded, but also considered the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on world development, as well as financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide. The summit ended with a Commitment that stressed the importance of ICTs in the fight against poverty since such technologies can lead to increased trade and employment. It therefore called upon governments and the private sector to enhance the capacity of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) because these small enterprises provide the greatest number of jobs in most economies. Participants also recognized that the ICT revolution can make the Information Society a truly inclusive one where rich and poor, men and women, migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, the unemployed and the disabled can join in sharing and expanding the base of human knowledge. In order to achieve this, however, access to ICTs must be universal, equitable and affordable. Participants emphasised that the protection of children and the defence of their rights in the context of ICTs is a primary concern, they also pointed to the advantages such technologies carry for education, health and science while boosting a knowledge economy which respects cultural and linguistic diversity. The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, for its part, is meant to shift attention from principles to action: it is in essence a Plan of Action focusing on three different points: the Financial mechanisms necessary to meet the challenges of ICT for development, internet governance (supported by the new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue: the Internet Governance Forum) and the practical implementation of the outcome of the summit as laid down in the Commitment.

The Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society of 17-18 November 2005

