

Comments of the Internet Society on the
World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
Draft Declaration of Principles and Action Plan

(Based on discussions in the Working Group of Sub-Committee 2)

1. Purpose

This document is in response to the WSIS Draft Declaration of Principles (Document WSIS/PCIP/DT/1-E) and Action Plan (WSIS/PCIP/DT/2-E) released: 21 March 2003

Representatives of the Internet Society (ISOC) have attended WSIS events since July 2001 and were part of the original Preparatory session in Coppet in December 2001 as well as being invited to speak at the "Informal Meetings on Topics" held in Geneva in September 2002. ISOC will continue its participation with the aim of providing advice to WSIS participants on Internet technology, IT and telecommunications policy, and Internet applications.

2. Internet SOCIety (ISOC)

ISOC, a not-for-profit organization, is a professional membership society with more than 150 organizations, 15,000 individual members in over 182 countries and 80 chapters. Members comprise companies, government agencies, individuals, organizations, and foundations.

ISOC's mission consists in ensuring the open development, evolution, and use of the Internet for the benefit of all people throughout the world. This can be summarized in the motto, "Internet is for Everyone." Our programs are built around three main pillars: Internet standards, education, and policy

Since 1992 ISOC has been the organizational home for the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), which develops the standards that ensure the stability, reliability, security, and scalability of the Internet. ISOC has provided technical training on Internet technologies to thousands of individuals and also provides valuable advice to governments on key Internet-related policy decisions to ensure the continued rapid growth of the Internet and the Information Society. Many ISOC members have introduced the Internet in their own countries and have played a pioneering role in the development of e-business, e-government, and other Internet applications.

In addition to its annual INET conferences, which bring together a broad cross-section of the Internet community, ISOC has organized Internet training workshops in several regions of the globe for more than ten years. Every year, full programme workshops are held in Latin America (WALC) in Spanish and Portuguese and in Africa in French and English, with international, high-level instructors. These workshops are mainly addressed to developing and emerging countries in order to create a critical mass of highly qualified and skilled specialists worldwide. Since 2001, ISOC has also organized a training programme on Next Generation Internet Protocol (IPv6).

ISOC strengths

- Pioneering reputation - the brightest technical minds in the Internet community
- Understanding of leading-edge Internet technologies
- Involvement in the standards process both at the IETF and elsewhere
- Global perspective

3. The Internet

Internet is fast becoming a mass medium and as a result there is increasing pressure on policy makers to regulate it like radio, television, or other mass media. The spread of broadband technologies is enabling new powerful uses of the Internet, Grid computing, peer-to-peer applications, and Web Services. The Internet is more than just a means for communications (through e-mail and instant messaging) and content distribution (through the World Wide Web). It is becoming a platform for collaboration and distributed computing. The continued development of the Internet is creating new technical, policy and societal challenges, and even more need for the kind of applications and education that the ISOC can provide.

4. ISOC's position

The Internet Society believes that the World Summit on Information Society can provide a valuable forum for discussion of policies and initiatives that can accelerate the deployment of the Internet and promote its use in countries throughout the world. ISOC is committed to working with governments, industry, and Internet users around the world to ensure that the Internet develops in a way that ensures that all Internet users can harness the full power of the Internet.

The first and over-arching goal of the Internet Society is to ensure the continued health and stability of the Internet. Accordingly, members of the Internet Society, working at the Internet Engineering Task Force and other Internet standards-setting bodies, have sought to development standards that will make the Internet more reliable, more secure, more robust, and more versatile. They have also sought to provide better technologies for enhancing privacy, providing authentication, and reducing the cost of Internet access. The Internet Society has also organized several major conferences and workshop on Internet security..

In additon, the Internet Society seeks to promote Internet policies and standards that ensure that Internet users around the world enjoy the following:

1) The Ability to Connect – We must preserve the essential, end-to-end nature of the Internet and avoid establishing standards or practices that would make it difficult or impossible for some users of the Internet to use the full range of applications being developed for Internet users. If Internet service providers or software providers build and provide Internet applications based on proprietary standards it could lead to the fragmentation of the Internet into hundreds of disconnected “walled gardens,” in which users are limited in the applications they can use.

2) The Ability to Speak -- The Internet offers a powerful tool for self-expression and is becoming a new mass medium. Governments should work to ensure that the Internet will continue to allow private and where appropriate, anonymous, means of communication and collaboration.

3) The Ability to Innovate -- The explosive growth of the Internet and the incredible variety of Internet applications are a direct result of the fact that the key standards for the Internet and the Web are open. Any company, regardless of size or location, has been able to develop and distribute its new "killer application" for the Internet. Governments and others should avoid actions that would restrict how technology can evolve in the future. The Internet can foster innovation, create new business opportunities for SMEs, and improve health and education, especially in the less-developed areas. The Internet Society is committed to the promotion of IPv6, new wireless technologies, and e-applications (e-learning, e-health, e-government, e-working), to support social and economic development. Furthermore, we have on-going education programs to help spur the use of such technologies and applications in countries throughout the world.

4) The Ability to Share -- The many-to-many nature of the Internet makes it a powerful tool for sharing, education, and collaboration. It has enabled the global, open source community that developed many of the key technological components of the Internet, such as the Domain Name System, the Web, and Apache (the most common Web server software). The Internet has also made the vision of digital libraries a reality. Accordingly, governments should foster the development of open source software and oppose new technologies and legislation that would limit the well-established concept of fair use, which is essential to scholarship, education, and collaboration.

5) The Ability to Choose -- The growth of the Internet has been fastest where markets are the most free and open. Unfortunately, in too many countries, particularly many less developed countries that could most benefit from the power of the Internet, government regulation and the economic power of incumbent telecom monopolies severely limit the ability of new competitors to provide new, better, cheaper, and innovative Internet-related services. Government policies should foster competition in telecommunication services, Internet service provision, Internet-related software, and e-commerce applications. Where this has been done, the cost of telecommunications services and Internet access has dropped dramatically, helping to bridge the Digital Divide and enable new and innovative uses of the Internet.

To further these goals, the Internet Society has articulated a number of specific policy positions:

- Promotion of IPv6

- Opposition to censorship of the Internet
- Promotion of competition in the telecommunications sector, which can reduce telecommunications costs and help bridge the Digital Divide
- Promotion of new wireless technologies (e.g. 802.11)
- Opposition to new database protection legislation
- Opposition to some government's restrictions on Voice over IP
- Opposition to regulatory provisions requiring ISP's to retain user data
- Promotion of Accessibility for the Disabled
- Opposition to encryption controls
- Opposition to legislation dictating Digital Right Management standards

ISOC Plan of Action in Information Society matters

- ISOC will continue providing educational programmes and regional Internet training workshops, particularly for developing and emerging countries
- ISOC will continue to raise awareness about new wireless technologies, IPv6, privacy issues and others topics that ensures the health, security, and continued rapid expansion of the Internet
- ISOC will continue working in countries around the world to develop new mechanisms for informing policy debates and key decision makers
- ISOC will continue supporting its national chapters and individual members worldwide in influencing key policy matters that matter in their own countries.
- ISOC will continue working with partners to ensure all people can enjoy the benefits of the Internet, e-business, e-government, and other Internet applications

Statement of Concern

With just over six months left before the Summit, the Internet Society is concerned that there is not yet a well-defined list of specific actions and initiatives that might be endorsed at the Summit. The draft Plan of Action and Declaration of Principles sets out many worthy goals, but does not make clear how those goals can and will be achieved. In addition, the draft documents attempt to address almost every aspect of the Information Society as well and many issues are not directly related to information technology or telecommunications. We would hope that the Summit would endorse a much shorter document that instead focuses on a few specific areas and have the assembled governments commit to specific actions that they will take to foster the continued growth of the Internet and the Information Society. In particular, we would recommend attention be focused on how governments can foster competition in the IT and telecommunications marketplace, how they can promote the use of open standards and open source software, how they can ensure free expression in cyberspace, and how they can foster public sector applications of the Internet, such as e-government, online education, and e-health.

We are very concerned by statements in the draft documents that imply the need for new, intergovernmental organizations to "manage" the Internet. In particular, proposals to replace ICANN and create a new mechanism for managing root servers, domain names and IP addresses is unnecessary, will lead to significant disruption, and is unlikely to succeed. The unprecedented growth and innovation that we have seen in the Internet sector is due in large part to the lack of regulation and constraints on technology development. In addition, the processes employed have been open, democratic and inclusive and it's hard to see how these could be improved by a new intergovernmental body. In 1985, no one could have predicted or planned the explosive growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web. Today, as the Grid, Web services, and new wireless Internet technologies promise to again transform the way we gather, process, and share information, we should continue to support the decentralized, bottom-up innovation that has made the Internet the powerful tool it is today. Non-governmental organizations such as the Internet Engineering Task Force, ICANN, and the World Wide Web Consortium, have proven very flexible and nimble and have enabled the global Internet community to quickly find consensus on how best to adopt and use new Internet technologies. Individual governments can and should support such organizations and ensure the full participation of their citizens in their activities.

ISOC's Contribution for WSIS Summit (Dec 2003)

The Internet Society is ready and willing to provide advice to the organizers of the World Summit on Information Society on key topics to be discussed, on potential speakers, and on possible initiatives that might be endorsed at the Summit. The global nature of the Internet Society and the fact that it is an individual membership organization means that its goal is to foster the overall growth of the Internet worldwide and not simply represent the interests of a handful of countries or companies. If there is interest, either Lynn St. Amour, the President of the Internet Society, Michael R. Nelson, ISOC's Vice President for Public Policy or Rosa Delgado, ISOC's representative to WSIS, would be glad to speak on behalf of the members of the Internet Society at the Summit.