

Statement on Internet Governance
Submitted by AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters)
Africa, FEMNET African Women's Development and Communication Network,
and TERRE DES FEMMES on behalf of the WSIS-Gender Caucus.

Tuesday, 27 September 2005

The WSIS Gender Caucus considers Internet Governance to be a crucial global Information Society issue. We have a shared responsibility to billions of people, both now and in the future. It makes no sense therefore to not acknowledge over 50% of the world's population. We believe that gender equality and women's empowerment are cross-cutting principles in Internet Governance as are the right to freedom of expression and human rights. Without these, it is impossible to achieve a just, participatory and equal information society.

Unfortunately, we note with dismay the lack of gender equality and indeed, any reference to gender in the Chair's Draft of Chapter 3. World leaders have recently reaffirmed the vital and core position of the principle of gender equality, in the UN Outcome Document, and the WGIG report includes, in Para 43, language on ensuring 'equal representation of women at all levels'. The WSIS Gender Caucus would like to see this recommendation included in all governance mechanisms and arrangements.

The WSIS Gender Caucus believes that Internet Governance functions will require decision-making about substantive public policy issues. Women's equal participation with men is vital in this decision making.

The GC also appreciates the emphasis given by the Chair to the development aspects of Internet Governance – infrastructure, capacity building, promoting participation from developing countries and multilingualism, and the Gender Caucus would like to see specific action on including women in these activities. Governments should make explicit commitments to implementing appropriate Internet Governance structures that are multi-stakeholder, inclusive, and transparent and that have the equal participation of women and men.

The issue of inter-connection mechanisms needs to be addressed urgently to contribute to the empowerment of developing countries, and their disconnected populations, which are predominantly female, rather than disadvantaging them as at present.

The Gender Caucus urges continued work on multilingualism as a way to promote local content and diversity on the Internet. Women's voices are particularly at risk of being muted by this issue.

The GC looks forward to engaging with other stakeholders in developing the WSIS recommendations on IG in a way that is consistent with the above stated principles that will contribute to achieving gender equality.

We have submitted written comments with specific text suggestions to the Secretariat.