Background papers

About WISIS

The **World Summit on the Information Society Forum (WSIS) 2017** represents the world's largest annual gathering of the 'ICT for development' community. The annual WSIS Forum is a global multi-stakeholder platform facilitating the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for advancing sustainable development. The Forum is co-organized by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD, in close collaboration with all WSIS Action Line co-/facilitators and other UN organizations (UNDESA, FAO, UNEP, WHO, UN Women, WIPO, WFP, ILO, WMO, ITC, UPU, UNODC, UNICEF and UN Regional Commissions). It provides an opportunity for information exchange, knowledge creation and sharing of best practices, while identifying emerging trends and fostering partnerships, taking into account the evolving Information and Knowledge Societies.

In follow up to the outcomes of the UN General Assembly Overall Review of the Implementation of WSIS Outcomes (Res. A/70/125) and with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Res. A/70/1), the WSIS Forum is constantly evolving and strengthening the alignment between the WSIS Action Lines and the Sustainable Development Goals. The WSIS Forum will therefore serve as a key forum for discussing the role of ICTs as a means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, with due regard to the global mechanism for follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNGA Resolution A/70/1).

Background

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The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is a unique two-phase United Nations (UN) summit that was initiated in order to create an evolving multi- stakeholder platform aimed at addressing the issues raised by information and communication technologies (ICTs) through a structured and inclusive approach at the national, regional and international levels. The goal of WSIS is to achieve a common vision, desire and commitment to build a people-centric, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information. The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005. In 2003, the number of participants was 11,000 representing 175 countries and in 2005 the number of participants was more than 19,000 representing 174 countries. Since then, a cluster of WSIS-related events was held on an annual basis. In 2009, the cluster of WSIS-related events was re-branded as WSIS Forum.

Geneva Phase 2003

The objective of the first phase was to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and take concrete steps to establish the foundations for an Information Society for all, reflecting all the different interests at stake.

Nearly 50 Heads of state/government and Vice-Presidents, 82 Ministers, and 26 Vice-Ministers from 175 countries as well as high-level representatives from international organizations, private sector, and civil society attended the Geneva Phase of WSIS and gave political support to the [Geneva Declaration of Principles and Geneva Plan of Action](#) that were adopted on 12 December 2003. More than 11,000 participants from 175 countries attended the Summit and related events.

- [Full texts of the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Geneva Plan of Action](#)

- [More on the first phase of WSIS](#)

Tunis Phase 2005

The objective of the second phase was to put Geneva's Plan of Action into motion as well as to find solutions and reach agreements in the fields of Internet governance, financing mechanisms, and follow-up and implementation of the Geneva and Tunis documents.

Nearly 50 Heads of state/government and Vice-Presidents and 197 Ministers, Vice Ministers and Deputy Ministers from 174 countries as well as high-level representatives from international organizations, private sector, and civil society attended the Tunis Phase of WSIS and gave political support to the [Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society](#) that were adopted on 18 November 2005. More than 19,000 participants from 174 countries attended the Summit and related events.

- [Full texts of the Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society](#)
- [More on the second phase of WSIS](#)

WSIS Forum

Building on Para 109 and Para 110 of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, WSIS Forum is organized each year, hosted by the ITU and co-organized by ITU, UNESCO, UNCTAD and UNDP. Information on previous forums is available here.

Geneva Phase 2003

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) outcome documents and the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/252 resolved to conduct an Overall Review of the Implementation of the WSIS Outcomes in 2015.

- [More information](#)

WSIS+10 High-Level Event 2014

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Outcome Documents and the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/252 resolved to conduct an overall review of the implementation of the Summit Outcomes in 2015. In this context, building upon the outcomes of the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) Open Consultations on WSIS+10, including the UNGIS Plan of Action for WSIS+10 and multi-stakeholder guidance provided at the WSIS Forum 2012 and 2013, ITU's Membership (PP-10 Resolution 172 and ITU Council Resolution 1334 (Mod. 2013)), resolved to hold an ITU Coordinated WSIS+10 High-Level Event in 2014 and to establish a preparatory process based on the open and inclusive WSIS+10 Multi-stakeholder Preparatory Platform (WSIS+10 MPP). The modalities for the Overall Review were discussed at the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly and are expected to be finalized shortly.

Following the guidance of its Membership (PP-10 Resolution 172 and ITU Council Resolution 1334 (Mod. 2013)), ITU initiated the preparatory process leading towards the WSIS+10 High-Level Event to be held in June 2014.

The WSIS+10 High-Level Event was an extended version of the WSIS Forum that:

- addressed the progress made in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes related to the WSIS Action Lines under mandates of the participating agencies

- provided a platform for multi-stakeholder coordination of the implementation of the WSIS outcomes, with involvement and participation of all WSIS action line facilitators, other UN agencies and all WSIS stakeholders.

The WSIS+10 High-Level Event reviewed the WSIS Outcomes (2003 and 2005), in particular, related to the Action Lines with a view to developing proposals on a new vision beyond 2015, potentially also exploring new targets. The event was organized taking into account decisions of the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly (negotiations on modalities started on 23 October 2013).

- [More information](#)

Overview

The UN General Assembly [Resolution 56/183](#) (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)** in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005.

Geneva Phase: 10-12 December 2003

The objective of the first phase was to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and take concrete steps to establish the foundations for an Information Society for all, reflecting all the different interests at stake.

Nearly 50 Heads of state/government and Vice-Presidents, 82 Ministers, and 26 Vice-Ministers from 175 countries as well as high-level representatives from international organizations, private sector, and civil society attended the Geneva Phase of WSIS and gave political support to the [Geneva Declaration of Principles and Geneva Plan of Action](#) that were adopted on 12 December 2003. **More than 11,000 participants from 175 countries** attended the Summit and related events.

- **[Full texts of the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Geneva Plan of Action](#)**

- [More on the first phase of WSIS](#)

Tunis Phase: 16-18 November 2005

The objective of the second phase was to put Geneva's Plan of Action into motion as well as to find solutions and reach agreements in the fields of Internet governance, financing mechanisms, and follow-up and implementation of the Geneva and Tunis documents.

Nearly 50 Heads of state/government and Vice-Presidents and 197 Ministers, Vice Ministers and Deputy Ministers from 174 countries as well as high-level representatives from international organizations, private sector, and civil society attended the Tunis Phase of WSIS and gave political support to the [Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society](#) that were adopted on 18 November 2005. **More than 19,000 participants from 174 countries** attended the Summit and related events.

- **[Full texts of the Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society](#)**

- [More on the second phase of WSIS](#)

Why a Summit on the Information Society

The Digital Revolution
The digital revolution, fired by the engines of Information and Communication Technologies, has fundamentally changed the way people think, behave, communicate, work and earn their livelihood. It has forged new ways to create knowledge, educate people and disseminate information. It has restructured the way the world conducts economic and business practices, runs governments and engages politically. It has provided for the speedy delivery of humanitarian aid and healthcare, and a new vision for environmental protection. It has even created new avenues for entertainment and leisure. As access to information and knowledge is a prerequisite to achieving the Millennium Development Goals – or MDGs -, it has the capacity to improve living standards for millions of people around the world. Moreover, better communication between peoples helps resolve conflicts and attain world peace.

The Digital Divide
Paradoxically, while the digital revolution has extended the frontiers of the global village, the vast majority of the world

remains unhooked from this unfolding phenomenon. With the ever-widening gulf between knowledge and ignorance, the development gap between the rich and the poor among and within countries has also increased. It has therefore become imperative for the world to bridge this digital divide and place the MDGs on the ICT-accelerated speedway to achievement.

World Summit - The Need for a Global Discussion
Recognizing that this new dynamic requires global discussion, the International Telecommunication Union, following a proposal by the Government of Tunisia, resolved at its Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis in 1998 (Resolution 73) to hold a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and place it on the agenda of the United Nations.

In 2001, the ITU Council decided to hold the Summit in two phases, the first from 10 to 12 December 2003, in Geneva, and the second from 16 to 18 November 2005 in Tunis. This was endorsed by the UN General Assembly (Resolution 56/183) while according the lead role to ITU in cooperation with other interested organizations and partners. It further recommended that preparations for the Summit take place through an open-ended intergovernmental Preparatory Committee – or PrepCom – that would define the agenda of the Summit, decide on the modalities of the participation of other stakeholders, and finalize both the draft Declaration of Principles and the draft Plan of Action.