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**REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE FOLLOW-UP TO
THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY**

OUTLINE

Source: 33 C/Resolution 52 and 174 EX/Decision 13 provided guidance for UNESCO's action in the implementation of and follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The Director-General submits to the General Conference a report on UNESCO's involvement in the post-WSIS process.

Background: Since the two WSIS meetings in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005, UNESCO has played a threefold role as one of the lead agencies in the overall coordination of WSIS activities, a facilitator of the implementation of six WSIS Action Lines in its areas of competence and an implementer of concrete activities within the framework of its programmes and budgets. UNESCO has also played an increasingly important role in a variety of post-WSIS initiatives, including in the international debate on Internet Governance.

Purpose: This item presents a report highlighting action undertaken by UNESCO since the 2005 Tunis phase of WSIS and seeks endorsement and renewed commitment by the General Conference of UNESCO's continued action in WSIS follow-up and implementation mechanisms, within the Organization's fields of competence.

Decision required: paragraph 39.

1. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), with the adoption of the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action in Tunis in Geneva (2003) and the Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society in Tunis (2005), was a landmark event in the UN-led Summit tradition. Gathering representatives from governments, international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector through an unprecedented inclusive format, WSIS has achieved a common understanding of the key principles of how to harness the potential of ICTs through the definition of principles and actions for building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge. The Summit established indicative targets to be achieved by 2015, based on internationally agreed development goals.

A. UNESCO's concept of knowledge societies: a unique contribution to WSIS

2. UNESCO's unique contribution to WSIS has been to emphasize the importance of the human dimension of the Information Society beyond connectivity and infrastructure, to highlight the importance of freedom of expression, education, information literacy, content and multilingualism, as well as to advocate multistakeholder approaches throughout the entire process.

3. In order to support its distinctive approach, UNESCO put forward the concept of knowledge societies, qualified by four key principles: freedom of expression, quality education for all, universal access to information and knowledge, and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. The concept of knowledge societies was recognized by the 2003 WSIS Declaration of Principles with a reference to the importance of the creation of a "true knowledge society". The UNESCO World Report "Towards Knowledge Societies" published in 2005 for the Tunis Summit contributed to develop this concept further, by providing an analysis of related challenges and guidance and recommendations for future-oriented and multidisciplinary action.

4. Today, in spite of advances in reducing the digital divide, including through the rapid growth rates of the number and use of mobile devices, the knowledge divide continues to exist, both among and within countries. UNESCO's goal to build knowledge societies that was included as one of the overarching objectives in its Medium Term Strategy for 2008-2013 (34 C/4) remains as relevant as ever.

B. UNESCO's role in the follow-up to WSIS

5. UNESCO's role in the follow-up to WSIS is threefold: The Organization acts as (a) one of the overall coordinators of the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action, (b) facilitator of the implementation of six WSIS Action Lines in its areas of competence, and (c) implementer of the WSIS Plan of Action.

- (a) UNESCO contributing to the overall coordination of the implementation of WSIS Plan of Action

6. WSIS entrusted UNESCO, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with leading facilitating roles in the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action. This role includes promoting coherence among the teams of stakeholders working to implement the 11 action lines of the plan of action and creating synergies between facilitators to maximize joint efforts, avoid duplication and enhance effectiveness among the teams of facilitators responsible for individual action lines. It also includes the organization of yearly facilitation meetings around World Information Society Day on 17 May since 2006.

7. In order to coordinate substantive and policy issues facing the implementation of the WSIS outcomes by the United Nations system, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) created the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) with UNESCO, ITU, UNDP and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as co-chairs. In May 2009, the UNGIS implemented the request of the CEB/HLCP to revise the

original terms of reference of the UNGIS with a view to also including the coordination of science and technology initiatives for development (decision of CEB's/HLCP).

8. Whereas the formal procedures for overall coordination of the implementation mechanisms have been put in place, the main challenge has been to keep up the momentum of Geneva and Tunis and to initiate multistakeholder implementation of concrete action through joint projects. In order to increase the level of engagement of stakeholders, a new format of the yearly facilitation meetings was introduced in 2009 with the “WSIS Forum 09”. Its focus on themes cutting across WSIS Action Lines (such as ICTs for development), high-level attendance and structured networking opportunities were recognized by participants as having a great potential to renew interest in WSIS implementation and prepare the 2010 mid-term review towards achieving the 2015 targets.

9. In a further effort to enhance the multistakeholder coordination and facilitate communication and cooperation also in between face-to-face meetings, UNESCO established an online community platform (<http://www.wsis-community.org/>) with advanced social networking features.

(b) UNESCO as a facilitator of the implementation of six WSIS Action Lines

10. UNESCO's second responsibility in the follow-up to the WSIS Plan of Action is to facilitate the multistakeholder implementation of six action lines in its areas of competence, namely “Access to information and knowledge” (C3); “E-learning” (C7); “E-science” (C7); “Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content” (C8); “Media” (C9) and “Ethical dimensions of the Information Society” (C10). The tasks include facilitating networking, information exchange, sharing of experiences and good practices and identification of synergies among stakeholders.

11. UNESCO has ensured its role as facilitator by elaborating with stakeholders and partners, the terms of reference, working methods and basic tools to facilitate the shared implementation of the above six action lines. UNESCO co-organized multistakeholder events in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 in conjunction with World Information Society Day on 17 May. These events provided opportunities for WSIS participants to share information, learn about latest developments, network and form partnerships, meet existing needs and develop joint strategies (for example, improving access to scientific information) to reach WSIS targets by 2015.

(c) UNESCO as an implementer of the Geneva Plan of Action

12. UNESCO's third responsibility is to implement concrete activities included in the Geneva Plan of Action in its areas of competence. Many of these activities have been reflected in UNESCO's strategies and integrated in successive biennial programmes and budgets, including in draft document 35 C/5, particularly in Major Programme V – Communication and Information, but also in the other major programmes underscoring the intersectoral nature of the WSIS implementation. Highlights¹ of some of the Organization's main achievements in this regard include:

Access to information and knowledge (Action Line C3)

13. In the area of access to information and knowledge, UNESCO has implemented a wide array of activities to harness the potential of ICTs to allow people, anywhere in the world, to access information and knowledge almost instantaneously.² For example, UNESCO, within the framework of the Information for All Programme (IFAP), supports Member States' efforts to develop national policy frameworks addressing issues such as information literacy, information preservation and information accessibility. Emphasis was also given to reinforcing the role of archives and libraries (infostructures) and that of educational institutions to create information literate societies.

¹ More at www.unesco.org/webworld/wsis.

² Geneva Plan of Action, C3. Access to information and knowledge, paragraph 10.

14. The Memory of the World Programme, one of UNESCO's flagship initiatives, has contributed to the protection of, and access to original documentary material and to sensitizing the public and decision-makers to the importance of heritage and memory. Links between the Programme and the newly launched World Digital Library will serve as a framework for national development and possible regional cooperation, including also the provision of diverse and multilingual content on the Internet.

15. Through a variety of partnerships, UNESCO has been promoting open access and open content policies as well as a diversity of choices through the use of open-source tools, especially for educational resources and scientific information.

E-learning (Action Line C7)

16. In the area of e-learning, UNESCO's activities focused on demonstrating the impact of ICT-based alternative educational delivery systems, notably for achieving Education for All targets.³ For example, UNESCO supported e-learning initiatives in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, for both formal and non-formal education. Capacity development opportunities were offered to ministry of education officials, higher education and teacher education institutions, and educators in community learning or multimedia centres.

17. Examples of e-learning projects launched include the ICT Competency Framework for Teachers, an instrument to define teacher capacities needed for the use of ICT in teaching and learning and the Open Training Platform (OTP), an online collaborative knowledge hub with almost 3,500 training and capacity-building resources.

18. Other examples of UNESCO's action towards successful integration of ICT into education systems include the development and application of ICT in the education policy-maker toolkit (<http://www.ictinedtoolkit.org/>), the development of capacities of educational policy-makers and planners and an initiative to promote open educational resources allowing hundreds of stakeholders from all over the world to exchange views and discuss key topics at regular intervals.

E-science (Action Line C7)

19. In the area of e-science, UNESCO has focused on implementing activities for making scientific information affordable and accessible in all countries on an equitable basis.⁴ A highlight has been the work on access to scientific knowledge and dissemination, with a special focus on developing countries and on "open access" strategies for e-science and access. For example, to promote knowledge for sustainable development through ICTs, UNESCO, in cooperation with EOLSS Publishers Co Ltd, has been developing the Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS), the world's largest knowledge base on sustainable development, for which universities in least developed countries and many institutions in developing countries have free access.

20. Another area consisted in addressing the lack of qualified and trained science teachers, a major obstacle to science education for example in Africa. The African Virtual Campus (AVC) thus aims at enhancing the capacity of Member States in sub-Saharan Africa to train science and technology teachers through e-learning. Two operational AVC centres were set up with multimedia equipment in Benin and Senegal and used to provide training in the production of online modules, e-learning and distance education.

21. In promoting the long-term systematic and efficient collection, dissemination and preservation of scientific digital data,⁵ an example of UNESCO's implementation activities was the celebration of the International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE; 2008) highlighting the use of ICTs for

³ Geneva Plan of Action, C4. Capacity-building, paragraph 11(f).

⁴ Geneva Plan of Action, C3. E-science, paragraph 22(b).

⁵ Geneva Plan of Action, C3. E-science, paragraph 22(d).

the study and understanding of the earth system and its resources. Actions include focusing on space technology for water resource management in Africa, a drought monitoring system for Africa and the world map of transboundary aquifers.

Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content (Action Line C8)

22. In the area of the promotion of cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content in cyberspace, UNESCO's contribution to the implementation is based on the conviction that cultural and linguistic diversity, while stimulating respect for cultural identity, traditions and religions, is essential to the development of knowledge societies based on dialogue among cultures.⁶

23. UNESCO's implementation activities focused, for example, on the promotion of cultural diversity and dialogue through the safeguarding of linguistic diversity, the formulation of national language policies, the dissemination of local content, also based on indigenous knowledge. At the country and regional levels, UNESCO concentrated on building capacities and provided policy advice through multistakeholder partnerships, to support the elaboration of regional and national language policies.

24. As lead agency in the coordination of the International Year of Languages (IYL; 2008), UNESCO raised awareness of decision-makers and the public on the importance of linguistic diversity, including through the organization of major conferences on standard-setting instruments promoting multilingualism, linguistic and cultural diversity in cyberspace and linguistic diversity, globalization and development.

25. To ensure the widest possible representation of linguistic and cultural communities on the Internet and to strengthen access to content that is relevant to all cultures and languages, UNESCO reinforced its cooperation with the Internet Corporation for Names and Numbers (ICANN). Efforts were geared towards providing linguistic expertise in the implementation of multilingual and multiscript domain names and towards raising awareness among Member States about this important Internet evolution.

Media (Action Line C9)

26. In the area of media, UNESCO's action is cognizant of the fact that media – in all their forms – have an essential role in the development of information society and are recognized as an important contributor to freedom of expression and plurality of information.⁷ Therefore, in addition to promoting freedom of expression and freedom of the press, UNESCO supported countries in their efforts to foster the development of free, independent and pluralistic media by facilitating the formulation and adoption of systems of regulations conducive to freedom of expression; plurality and diversity of media; encouraging media as platforms for democratic discourse; strengthening capacity-building of media professionals; and promoting the development of infrastructural capacities.

27. Another significant contribution of UNESCO to WSIS implementation in the area of media is the development of Media Development Indicators. In addition, with the support from the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), UNESCO implemented more than 250 media development partnership projects worldwide and enhanced journalism education with model curricula. Journalism education institutions in Africa were supported in their efforts to reach the agreed criteria of training excellence and media trainers were trained on reporting sustainable development issues. Guidelines for gender sensitive reporting and gender equality in media were fostered and community access to information was provided through community multimedia centres (CMC) worldwide.

⁶ Geneva Plan of Action, C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content, paragraph 23.

⁷ Geneva Plan of Action, C9. Media, paragraph 24.

Ethical dimensions of the information society (Action Line C10)

28. In the area of the ethical dimensions of the Information Society, UNESCO worked with all stakeholders to foster universally held values, and to promote the common good⁸ of ICTs. This included naturally UNESCO's ongoing activities to promote the respect for peace and to uphold the fundamental values of freedom, including freedom of expression and freedom of information, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility and respect for nature.

29. Actions to increase the awareness of stakeholders of the ethical use of ICTs, included, for example, the facilitation of reflection, debate and information sharing on ethical, legal and societal aspects of the information society among media and information professionals, decision-makers and experts from a wide range of environments under the auspices of IFAP, through a series of regional workshops on ethics, so far in Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia and the Pacific, including reflections on information ethics and e-governance.

C. Participating in international post-WSIS initiatives

30. In addition to its threefold role as a coordinator, facilitator and implementer of the WSIS outcomes, UNESCO has been providing strategic input to major initiatives established in the follow-up to WSIS highlighting the concept of knowledge societies as its unique value proposition. This included the Partnership for measuring ICT for development and the debates surrounding Internet governance.

Partnership on measuring ICT for development

31. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics has, under the auspices of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, led the development of internationally comparable indicators to measure progress of countries across the world toward the integration of ICT in education. UIS has delivered a minimum core set of nine international indicators at the 40th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) in February 2009, and launched a "Working Group on ICT Statistics in Education" with more than 20 committed countries which are testing these tools, to monitor progress towards the WSIS goals.

Internet governance

32. Among the important outcomes of the WSIS Tunis phase was the establishment by the United Nations Secretary-General, in an open and inclusive process, of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) for multistakeholder policy dialogue with a five-year mandate, currently under review, to discuss public policies issues related to Internet governance.

33. The establishment of IGF recognized the Internet as a global public facility whose governance constitutes a core issue of the Information Society agenda. The international management of the Internet should be a transparent, democratic and multilateral process, with the participation of governments, private sector, civil society and international organizations, in their respective roles.⁹

34. UNESCO, which contributed to IGF meetings in 2006, 2007, 2008 and is preparing for its contribution to the fourth IGF meeting in November 2009, has consistently highlighted that Internet governance mechanisms should be based on the principle of "openness", encompassing interoperability, freedom of expression in knowledge societies and measures to resist any attempt to censor content. There should be no changes in Internet governance mechanisms that impede the free flow of information and ideas on the Internet.

⁸ Geneva Plan of Action, C10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society, paragraph 25.

⁹ Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, paragraph 61.

35. The lack of linguistic diversity on the Internet, in terms of available content and technical design, represents an essential barrier to access. As this key challenge of Internet governance is at the heart of UNESCO's own mission, the Organization will continue to contribute to the development of multilingual domain names that will allow users to establish and use domains in their native languages and scripts, promoting the potential of the Internet as a truly universally accessible space. Other areas of importance to UNESCO are freedom of expression, access to information and the protection of personal data and privacy.

D. UNESCO's continued commitment

36. As access to technology and connectivity has exponentially grown since the two WSIS events in Geneva and Tunis, the realization of the vision of the Summit participants to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society and indeed, knowledge societies, seems to be increasingly reachable despite the digital and knowledge divides. In this rapidly evolving context, UNESCO will continue to assist its stakeholders in harnessing the power of technology to increase access to information and knowledge in general and to foster education for all, scientific research and innovation and cultural diversity, in particular, and to operationalize its concept of knowledge societies, in general.

37. UNESCO will also continue to strive towards realizing the principles set by WSIS and reaching the targets of its Plan of Action in its threefold role as coordinator, facilitator and implementer. In doing so, UNESCO will endeavour to refocus the overall WSIS implementation from process to the achievement of concrete results.

38. However, reaching the goals set by WSIS requires enhanced partnerships and renewed commitment from the entire international community, particularly in light of the ongoing multiple global crises that exacerbate the challenges of WSIS follow-up and implementation. UNESCO will continue to foster inclusion and active participation of multiple stakeholders in the WSIS implementation process and other post-WSIS initiatives, promote the systematic facilitation of WSIS implementation at regional and country levels, including through advocating for the inclusion of WSIS-related issues in United Nations-wide common country programming exercises, fostering international coordination and facilitation and addressing, together with its stakeholders, major new trends in building knowledge societies that have emerged since the two Summit events in Geneva and Tunis.

E. Proposed draft resolution

39. In the light of the foregoing, the General Conference may wish to adopt the following resolution:

The General Conference,

Recognizing the importance of the commitments of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) for meeting internationally agreed development goals by 2015 and the importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development,

Recalling 33 C/Resolution 52 and 174 EX/Decision 13 addressing UNESCO's role in the follow-up to WSIS,

Noting the important role the international community gave UNESCO in the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action as one of the overall coordinators, as a facilitator of the implementation of six WSIS Action Lines in its areas of competence; and as an implementer of the WSIS Plan of Action,

Welcoming the initiatives taken by the Director-General for the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action,

1. Invites Member States and Associate Members to:
 - (a) participate actively in the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action;
 - (b) provide extrabudgetary funds in support of UNESCO's WSIS follow-up and implementation action;
2. Invites non-governmental organizations maintaining official relations with UNESCO, the private sector and civil society to:
 - (a) work in close partnership with governments, other stakeholders and UNESCO in the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action;
 - (b) strengthen cooperation with the UNESCO Secretariat at Headquarters and in the field in implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action;
3. Requests the Director-General to:
 - (a) develop the "knowledge society" concept further, with a view to operationalizing it at regional and country levels, in particular by including relevant deliverables in the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs);
 - (b) ensure that UNESCO continues to play its role as coordinator, facilitator and implementer in an intersectoral and interdisciplinary manner;
 - (c) strengthen UNESCO's involvement in the international debate on Internet Governance;
 - (d) develop the "knowledge societies" concept further, with a view to operationalizing it at regional and country levels and to be fully implemented in the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs);
 - (e) include in the work plans of document 35 C/5 appropriate provisions for UNESCO's further contribution to the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action;
 - (f) ensure that the Draft Programme and Budget for 2012-2013 (36 C/5) includes appropriate provisions for ensuring UNESCO's contribution to meeting the 2015 WSIS goals.