The Declaration of the Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society

GENEVA DECLARATION

11 December 2003

Introduction


As the representatives of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, Nations, and Tribes and recognizing the full diversity of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, who live in both, urban, rural and remote settings, we declare the following fundamental principals for building the information society that is inclusive of our cultural diversity and indigenous information communications styles and respects our rights in forming partnerships in action. All the following statements apply to Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, our Elders, women, men, youth and children, in order that States abide by and respect them.

The Information Society is the result of a global revolution in the fields of economics, technology and social development. Its primary aspects are knowledge, information, communication and access to services and products. These elements of the Information Society, by their very nature are reflective of the political and economic status of the dominant society. This global revolution has had and continues to have a profound and deep impact on the cultures and communities of the world’s Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, most of whom continue to live in extreme poverty without basic provision for food, water, shelter, electricity and other basic infrastructure.

At the heart of our vision of the Information Society is respect for the dignity and human rights of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, which must be affirmed, if the economic, information and digital divide which separates technology rich nations and the private sector from the most marginalized peoples of society including Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, is to be bridged.

In this context, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be used to support and encourage cultural diversity and to preserve and promote the language, distinct identities and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes in a manner which they determine best advances these goals. The evolution of the information and communication societies must be founded on the respect and promotion of the rights of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes and our distinctive and diverse cultures, as outlined in international conventions. We have fundamental and collective rights to protect, preserve and strengthen our own languages, cultures and identities.
The prerequisite for the inclusion of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes in the Information Society is the provision of adequate infrastructure in States for tele-communications, radio, television, the internet and ICT providers, with the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes concerned. This requires access to basic community infrastructure such as electricity and energy sources. It is the desire of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes that the provision of infrastructure and energy by achieved in sustainable ways and the use of alternative technologies should be investigated to ensure the environment is protected. States should take immediate action to address the needs of all Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes in their countries and should support developing nations and countries in transition, in their effort to provide ICT infrastructure.

Some Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes have made strides in bridging the information divide with the assistance of state and private sector support and financial subsidies. Our achievements demonstrate that equitable partnerships between Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes and others can be attained. These indigenous approaches and programs are resources, which can be transmitted to others through indigenous to indigenous training projects in order to meet the need of the vast majority of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, who have a critical need for culturally appropriate capacity building programmes. Capacity building programmes should begin at the grassroots level and should ensure gender equity.

Human Rights

We declare that our participation in building and implementing the information society must be based on our right to self-determination, and honour and respect of the spirit and intent of Treaties. Towards this end, we ask that States consider the rapid adoption of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, which we regard as minimal standards for the achievement of equity and social justice.

We declare that the protection and preservation of our indigenous languages and development of our traditional knowledge cannot be separated from our right to maintain and strengthen our distinctive spiritual and material relationship with our lands, territories, resources, air, inland waters and coastal seas. Access to ICT should not replace indigenous/traditional ways of knowing. Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes have a right and cultural obligation to preserve and transmit our ways of life, which includes our ways of knowing, to younger generations.

We declare that our cultural protocols, traditions, customary law and natures law, especially concerning sacred information and knowledge, must be respected. Arrangements for equitable benefit sharing must be based on our free, prior and informed consent. We declare our desire to work collectively with others in the Information Society to create an ethical code and standards for best practices, which will be inclusive of our cultural values.

Education and Culture

We have the right to fully access and participate in decision-making processes (at all levels) concerning State Education (and the use of modern technologies). We also have the right to establish and control our own education systems based on our cultural methods, in our own languages and to plan and control our ICT application, as we see fit. We have the right to
establish and control ICT training and application in indigenous educational systems, based on our own cultural methods of teaching and learning (of wisdom and cultural knowledge), in our own languages. We need to be key members and an integral part of the ICT capacity building for our communities.

We call on States, civil society and the private sector to partner with Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, to provide the needed resources for the development and implementation of “indigenous-to-indigenous” training projects, including “elders-and-youth” initiatives. This process will allow for the building of local capacity and expertise, and for programs that will be self sustaining.

We are entitled to culturally appropriate forms of distance learning as a complement to our methods of oral, personal, and intergenerational learning that are an integral part of indigenous learning and the transmission of language and culture.

To ensure equitable access to the Global Information Society, we need to develop our own approaches in the utilization of ICT that can be adapted to our own patterns and protocols of communication.

We are entitled to education and capacity building methods that are rooted in our languages, cultures and traditional knowledge that are fundamental in validating and affirming indigenous self-esteem and identity.

To promote mechanisms that enable Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes to realize culturally adaptive applications to the ICT best practices and technology need to be shared among various Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes. In order to do so, regional, national and international meetings and workshops have to be held to exchange information about educational projects between indigenous individuals, groups and peoples.

Social and Economic Development

We have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising our right to development. All development measures including those relating to the implementation of the Information Society, must be controlled by the Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes concerned and carried out in equal partnership with them. Participation, negotiation, and free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes must be recognized as key elements of any development process.

We have the right to establish and control our own Information Communication and Technology (ICT), further developing our fundamental right to social and economic progress. We have the right to participate in all manner of media and Information Communication Technology in mainstream ICT systems, nationally and internationally, in order to further strengthen our social and economic development strategies.

We have the right to appropriate capacity-building and support in developing a sounder financial base, in order to keep up with technological developments and to build partnerships and networks.

Health
Technology can assist in meeting our dire need for primary health care. It is a vehicle to success in achieving the Millennium Development Goals relating to infant mortality and maternal health care. Technology can also support preventative health education and through Tel-med applications, provide services over vast geographic distances. Information technology should be used to promote and protect our traditional healing practices as well as to improve our access to mainstream health services. This potential can only be realized through collective efforts and equitable partnerships between Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, States, civil society and the private sector. This is considered a high priority.

**Indigenous Cultural Property** (includes Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Intellectual Property and the Media)

We are the owners and guardians of the Traditional Ancestral Knowledge of our cultures that have been transmitted through aeons by our oral traditions and ceremonial cultural practices. Existing intellectual property regimes that favour individual property rights within the public domain are insufficient for the protection of indigenous intellectual property, which is the collective inheritance of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes and the legacy of future generations.

Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes have the right to both fully explore existing legal regimes and to develop *sui generis* legal systems, in order to safeguard traditional knowledge and to ensure protection of sacred and/or secret content. This right encompasses the wealth of traditional knowledge, including but not limited to ethno-botanical and genetic applications of traditional knowledge and traditional knowledge systems relating to medicinal and agricultural practices.

An indigenous media agency should be established, in cooperation with relevant United Nations organizations, to advise on legal protection and dissemination of information on indigenous political, cultural and economic situations; and stories, articles, videos, images, and products of indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, utilized for commercial purposes, through all forms of media, including print. Furthermore, relevant United Nations agencies, coordinated by the Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues, should in cooperation with Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, elaborate a code of ethics regarding mainstream media researching or reporting on indigenous communities.

An internationally recognized indigenous products symbol should be encouraged and supported by States, in order to protect Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes intellectual property, for all ICT innovations belonging to Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes either individually or collectively.

The United Nations and Member States should promote mechanisms to ensure the effective protection of the collective knowledge, innovations, and practice of the Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, linked to cultural and biological diversity.

**Environment**

The environment is a concern for us all. ICTs, including radio and video, provide excellent opportunities to showcase and educate about the natural beauty and diversity in which we live.
and can further our efforts to protect our lands and territories. Indigenous peoples are interested in producing multi-media education materials to assist in environmental education. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes share the responsibility of protecting the environment and to live in sustainable ways. ICTs should be used to promote sustainable forms of living for the benefit of our whole planet.

There should be no construction of ICT equipment on Indigenous territories without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples.

Environmental and cultural impact assessments on indigenous territories (lands, waterways, airspace, seas and oceans) must be carried out with the effective participation of the indigenous people/s before any ITC construction takes place.

ICT construction, whether on lands, waterways, airspace or in the oceans, should not proceed if there are concerns of negative environmental or cultural impacts.

**Our Road to Tunis**

To assure the meaningful participation of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes in Tunis in 2005 and in all preparatory conferences leading up to Tunis, the following recommendations need to be implemented:

The Tunis Global Forum of Indigenous peoples and the Information Society (GFIPIS) should be convened at the same site of the Tunis WSIS and should precede the WSIS by four (4) days.Registrations for the GFIPIS should include access to WSIS.

Indigenous members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, in coordination with regional indigenous organizations, should be included in 2004 during the planning of the Tunis WSIS.

Travel and per diem grants for lodging and support for Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes should be funded by States and private sector and provided within sufficient time to allow proper planning and participation. Contributions should be sent to the Permanent Forum, which should ensure equal allocation among the indigenous regions taking into account gender, age and geographic equity.

A broad based effort should be made to inform Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes about the dates, location and all relevant matters of the Tunis regional preparatory conferences in early 2004. Email announcements should also be distributed to all participants of the annual sessions of the United Nations Permanent Forum on indigenous Issues.