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of the Participation of all Relevant Stakeholders
in the Activities of the Union Related to WSIS
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4th meeting of the WG on the Study of the Participation of all Relevant Stakeholders in the Activities of the Union Related to WSIS

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Mr. Co-Chairs,

The Conference of NGOs has followed with great interest the recent developments occurred in the Council Working Group on the Study of the Participation of all Relevant Stakeholders in the Activities of the Union Related to WSIS. It is indeed part of CONGO's mandate to promote the strengthening of the relationship between NGOs and the UN system, and this particularly relates to the ITU in the aftermath of the successful interactions taking place during WSIS and its preparatory process.

Background documents prepared by the ITU Secretariat

The two documents compiled by the ITU Secretariat at the request of the Working Group will prove to be very a useful background for all actors interested in the objectives of this working group. In particular, the analysis report on existing mechanisms and practices for stakeholder participation in the UN, other UN specialized agencies and intergovernmental organisations¹ provides valuable inputs on the current participation models for civil society entities. The methodology used by the Secretariat will facilitate a common understanding on the way the UN organizations, funds and programmes have accommodated their relationship with civil society, in particular NGOs, identified relevant stakeholders for their specific mandate and defined modalities their participation in the activities of the relevant organisation at various levels. The analysis helps mapping out a number of principles that have been considered by most of international organisations, in particular entities part of the UN system, in building working relationships with civil society and non-governmental organisations. This includes:

- Accreditation procedures and modalities for participation in governing bodies, decision making processes of the organisation, as well as in other informal processes of the organisation;
- Differentiation between not-for-profit organisations and corporate sector entities in terms of conditions for involvement,

¹ WG-Study/4/02, Rev.1: Secretariat Background Paper on the analysis of existing mechanisms and practices for stakeholder participation in the United Nations, other specialized agencies and intergovernmental organizations.

- Recognition of the role of the Secretariats in facilitating interactions between the intergovernmental organisation and the wider civil society, including through liaison activities, information sharing and outreach activities.

We are convinced that these documents, building upon previous discussions between a number of NGOs, the ITU Secretariat and ITU members, will help identifying an appropriate set of criteria to determine the relevant stakeholders, as well as appropriate modalities for their participation.

We would also recommend that the modalities of civil society involvement in the Internet governance Forum and in other non-UN global ICT policy institutions could also be included in the reflection to be lead by the members of this ITU Council Working Group.

A large number of civil society actors which have demonstrated expertise in telecommunication activities have currently not the possibility of becoming Sector or Associate member of the ITU because they are specialised in a too limited range of issues. At the same time, the specific – and, in a way, very open – nature of the Sector and Associate Membership modalities developed within the ITU might not be fully adapted to the reality of the civil society involvement in international organisations. This would justify that a number of civil society entities have developed advanced, effective but still *ad hoc* interactions with the ITU Secretariat and ITU processes.

Added value of an increased involvement of civil society in ITU activities

As demonstrated in a number of other policy development processes, international organisations have very substantially benefited from an increased involvement of civil society actors in their proceedings.

- Civil society actors can convey the message and expertise coming from communities concerned and directly affected by a number of decisions to be taken by ITU.
- Civil society entities, because of their flexibility and their direct and cross-cutting involvement in the fast-evolving nature of the information society, can bring to international organisations valuable inputs on emerging issues and with a transversal perspective.
- NGOs and civil society entities have become one of the most publicly trusted groups. Their greater involvement in ITU activities, in particular in those related to WSIS, would also contribute to increase the visibility of the organisation within other groups of actors.

Previous proposals expressed by civil society representatives

On the occasion of previous consultations, civil society actors interested in the ITU activities made a number of suggestions, among which:

- the on line availability of ITU documentation for other stakeholders;
- the establishment of an ITU civil society liaison office,
- the setting up of a roster of civil society entities which could send documentation and be invited as observer to intergovernmental policy processes on their area of expertise,
- the opening-up of ITU-D to development civil society actors and grassroots and field based organisations;
- considering arrangements for informal interaction towards information exchange and consultation with the ITU Secretariat;
- increased use of remote participation modalities.

4th meeting of the Council WG

The Working Group will discuss at its next meeting about the modalities for answering the questionnaire. CONGO stresses the need to have a consultation process which must be as open and inclusive as possible. While we understand the need to have a distinction in the analysis of the answers provided by Member States and civil society groups, we would encourage Members of the Working to give them equally careful consideration and similar importance in the course of their reflection.

We invite Members of the Working Group to develop the consultation modalities taking into account the need to combine both remote participation modalities (through electronic answers to the questionnaire or the establishment of an on-line Forum that would be open to WSIS accredited civil society organisations as well as to other civil society entities concerned by this process) and face-to-face interactions between Members of the Council Working Groups and other interested stakeholders.

We also encourage the ITU Council Working Group and its Secretariat to make the best use possible of the 2008 WSIS related cluster of events to further the discussion and organise open consultations with interested stakeholders, following the consultation model previously used by the ITU Council Working Group on WSIS and on the occasion of the 2007 WSIS related cluster of events.

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We once more thank you for your role as facilitator of the discussions of the Council Working Group on the Study of the Participation of all Relevant Stakeholders in the Activities of the Union Related to WSIS. We would be pleased in this letter could be circulated to the members of the ITU Council WG on the Study of the Participation of all Relevant Stakeholders in the Activities of the Union Related to WSIS.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for any further information or comment, including during its up coming meeting.

With my best regards,

CC: M. Hamadoun Touré
ITU Secretary-General