Phase 2: World Summit on the Information Society

Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society:
"Towards an International Indigenous Portal"

FINAL REPORT
November 14, 2005

INTRODUCTION:

Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society Parallel Event

1. This report provides an overview of discussions held at the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), at the parallel event entitled Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society, held November 14, 2005 in Tunis, Tunisia. The theme of this parallel event was "Towards an International Indigenous Portal." This parallel event built on the success of the Indigenous Planning Conference for Tunisia, held in Ottawa, Canada, March 17- 18, 2005, and the Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society, held in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2003 as part of the first phase of WSIS. Co-Chairs for this parallel event were Wilton Littlechild, Member, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and Eliane Potiguara, Board Member, Comitê Intertribal (ITC).

Purpose of the Parallel Event

2. The purpose of the parallel event, Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society, was to review actions to date in relation to international Indigenous connectivity, to share regional experiences regarding the same, including best practices and challenges, to explore the viability of, and issues regarding, an International Indigenous Portal, and to allow participants the opportunity to craft an International Indigenous e-Strategy in the post-WSIS environment, with particular attention to the Second International Decade of the Worlds' Indigenous People and the Millennium Development Goals.

Organizers and Sponsors

3. This parallel event was organized under the auspices of the WSIS International Indigenous Steering Committee (IISC), formed at the Closing Plenary session of the Indigenous Thematic Planning Conference for Tunisia. Other event sponsors were the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency, OCCAM (Observatory for Culture and Audio-Visual Communications), the Global Knowledge Partnership, UNESCO, and the Cisneros Foundation.

International Indigenous Steering Committee (IISC)

4. When formed in March, 2005, the immediate goals of the IISC were to ensure a strong Indigenous presence at the second phase of WSIS, to pursue increased partnerships among Indigenous peoples, States, UN Agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and the academic community, to help disseminate best practices in the entire range of Information and Communications (ICT) development, and to ensure that the international dialogue regarding Indigenous connectivity does not end with the second phase of WSIS.

5. The parallel event included a review of WSIS and the Road to Tunisia by Kenneth Deer, a review of the Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society by Wilton Littlechild and seven regional reports presented by IISC members focusing on Africa (Saoudata Aboubacrine), Asia (Lucky Sherpa), North America (Ernest Franklin), Latin America and the Caribbean (Roberto Borrero), the Pacific (Malia Nobrega and Teanau Tuiono), Eastern Europe and Russia (Irina Kurilova), and the Arctic (Naja Paulsen). A special presentation was given by the Cisneros Foundation. On the subject of connectivity and current portal initiatives presentations were made on behalf of Incomindios, the Aboriginal Canada Portal, the Navajo Nation and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The event concluded with participants providing recommendations and conclusions.

6. The IISC's mandate will conclude on March 31, 2006. An Indigenous ICT Task Force will be formed to carry out the recommendations and conclusions contained in this report.

CONCLUSIONS:

Endorsements

7. The participants reiterated their support for the WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action, the Indigenous Declaration and Plan of Action flowing from the 2003 Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society, the articulation of challenges and the path forward contained in the report of the WSIS Indigenous Thematic Planning Conference for Tunisia (2005), and support for commitments to Indigenous peoples within the Tunis Commitment of the second phase of WSIS.

International Indigenous Portal

8. Participants strongly supported the further exploration and creation of an international Indigenous portal in accordance with the goals and aspirations expressed in the documents listed in paragraph 7 above, as well as synchronization between current international Indigenous portal initiatives. For the purposes of this report the definition of a "portal" includes, but is not limited to, a web presence or other services that promote universal connectivity and offer a broad array of information and resources.

The Information Society

9. 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. 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 poverty without basic provisions for food, water, shelter, electricity and other basic infrastructure.

Respect for the Dignity and Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples

10. Participants reaffirmed that 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.

Universal Connectivity and Portal Rationale

11. In this context, ICTs should be used to support and encourage cultural diversity and to preserve, protect and promote the Indigenous right to self-determination, the languages, 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. An international Indigenous portal is one way to promote communication between Indigenous individuals, communities and peoples around the world, especially in the most remote regions where conventional communication is simply not possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

An Indigenous-led Initiative

12. Indigenous peoples should drive all aspects of the planning, development, execution and accountability of an international Indigenous portal. This work should include regional consultations, research and analysis in order to fully understand the needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples in this context. Such initiatives should respect the concept of free, prior and informed consent, as well as ensure equal participation of Indigenous women, Indigenous youth, and Indigenous people with disabilities.

Need for Analysis of Existing Sites and Portals

13. In proceeding toward the goal of an international Indigenous portal, the need for national and regional portals should be concurrently explored. In addition, there is a need for analysis of existing Indigenous sites and portals. Such analysis should identify what is and is not being dealt with by such sites and portals, and identify a plan for closing what information gaps may exist.

Thematic Focus of an International Indigenous Portal

14. The emphasis of this process should be on the ability of technology to support vibrant, self-determining Indigenous communities and the revitalization and evolution of Indigenous languages and cultures, to increase communications between Indigenous peoples on human rights, and to share best practices in relation to the provision of services in such areas as education, health, social and economic development, and governance, among others.

ICT Development and Broader Development Issues

15. Universal Indigenous connectivity and the development of Indigenous-specific ICTs should be viewed as a necessity for healthy communities along with other pressing developmental issues as recognized within the Millennium Development Goals and the Millennium Declaration, including, but not limited to:
    - poverty alleviation
    - food security
    - other basic infrastructure needs, including electricity and water
    - training and capacity development
    - the sustainability of social and economic development projects, including those involving information and communications technology
    - the need to recognize the great diversity of culture and experience of Indigenous peoples around the world
    - the need for disaggregated data specific to Indigenous peoples on a state by state basis

Cooperation Between Indigenous Portal Initiatives

16. Given the multiplicity o f current portal and universal connectivity initiatives, it is important that these various groups work together and try not to duplicate efforts. Representatives of the various portal initiatives should work together, find linkages to maximize the efficiency of their work, and, wherever possible, meet in person in aid of these objectives.

International Indigenous Portal Architecture and Content

17. The information architecture of the portal should reflect the goals and aspirations expressed in the documents listed in paragraph 7 above. Keeping in mind that ICTs can be used in many areas, impacting all issues of interest to Indigenous peoples, the content of an international Indigenous portal should include, but not be limited to:
    - languages and cultures, including the ability to share and discuss with privacy and security, as well as retention, preservation, and evolution for the empowerment of individual and collective voices within and among Indigenous peoples
    - the promotion and monitoring of the Second Decade's Programme of Action
    - the promotion and monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals
    - education
    - Indigenous women's issues
    - youth and elder services
    - disability issues

- health services
- economic development
- e-government (especially in remote areas)
- security and public safety
- environmental protection and management
- human rights education and development
- local and regional cultural and linguistic diversity
- focal points for Indigenous peoples' issues within United Nations' agencies
- funding sources and programs at the local, sub-national, national, regional and international levels
- focal points for Indigenous peoples' issues within state governments
- conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives
- e-Services

Future Work

18. Indigenous participants at the second phase of WSIS will continue to work together to articulate and pursue an International Indigenous e-Strategy in the post-WSIS environment, with particular attention to target with policies, programs, projects and budget for the development of Indigenous peoples within the framework of the Second International Decade of the Worlds' Indigenous People, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Millennium Declaration.[1]

19. In the crafting of an International Indigenous E-strategy in the post-WSIS environment, the Indigenous ICT Task Force will include Principles and Fundamental e-Strategies presented in the specific areas of concern of Indigenous peoples. These include, but are not limited to:
    - traditional knowledge
    - free, prior and informed consent
    - ICT applications
    - resources and funding
    - accountability (studies and reporting analysis)
    - education and languages
    - culture
    - health
    - youth and gender issues
    - environment
    - media
    - e-business

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[1] For the purposes of this report the definition of an e-strategy includes, but is not limited to, an over-all plan of action that includes a technology component.

20. These strategies will also contain e-Strategies related to:
    - Indigenous ownership and operation of communications infrastructure, transmission and access media
    - Indigenous regulatory authority and consultative inclusion in State regulation of non-Indigenous communications providers and their supporting industries
    - the creation and application of communications access and ownership laws and regulations

Need for Resources and Partnerships

21. Significant resources will be required for all ICT initiatives as articulated in the forthcoming International Indigenous e-Strategy, including the creation and maintenance of an international Indigenous portal. With an emphasis on Indigenous-to-Indigenous initiatives, the continued support, both financial and in-kind (including, but not limited to, training and capacity development), should be pursued with:
    - UN agencies (particularly the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the International Telecommunications Union)
    - States
    - NGOs
    - the private sector

The participants recognize and acknowledge the support of the sponsors of the parallel event at the second phase of WSIS, look forward to a continued relationship with these entities, and strongly encourage a Global Indigenous ICT Forum within 2 years. Regional consultations should be held in preparation for this Forum.

Beyond Tunisia

22. The international dialogue regarding Indigenous connectivity will not end with the second phase of WSIS. Discussions at any number of international gatherings, including upcoming meetings of the UN Permanent Forum and the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations will continue in the context of the International Indigenous e-Strategy. Indigenous peoples will participate as stakeholders in WSIS implementation and follow-up.