

Comments of Jeanette Hofmann, Internet Governance Project and WZB
At the conclusion of the first Internet Governance Forum, November 2,
2006

Thank you, Minister, Michaelis Liapis,
Thank you Nitin Desai,
Markus Kummer,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I'd like to share with you a little story that I will take home from the forum.

It happened on Tuesday while I was moderating a workshop. Although it was late, the room was nonetheless packed and all chairs were taken. A few minutes after the workshop started, somebody from the German Foreign Office walked into the room, and since no chair was left, she chose to sit on the floor – on the floor, I should add, of temporary UN territory.

So, what makes this a symbolic incident? It is the striking contrast to the seating order we are used to from WSIS and other intergovernmental processes. The forum has no seating order. There are no tables for delegations with nameplates on it and above all, there are no time slots for non-governmental actors. Governments have queued jointly with civil society and private sector in order to take the floor.

The forum offers the great opportunity to experiment with new formats of communication and consensus building across all sorts of geographical, cultural, sectoral and political boundaries. The secretariat and the chair have made great efforts to maximize the speaking time not only for panellists, but particularly for the audience.

The great innovation we have been witnessing here is the setting up of a global *talk shop* in the most constructive sense. The fact that the forum has no mandate to make binding decisions is the very precondition for equity among the stakeholders who attend this meeting.

However, in order to make good use of the forum, it is vital that *all* stakeholders recognize and adopt this new venue as an innovative place of policy making.

- While it is good that governments attend the forum with the intention to listen, it is important that they also practically engage with civil society and work on concrete solutions.

- And while it is good that the private sector is present and shows its willingness for dialogue, we hope that industry will reach out to other corporations and strengthen participation from developing countries.
- And while it is good to meet again so many friends from the WSIS process here in Athens, we need to keep in mind that there would be many more people attending from civil society if we could provide them with funding. In order to make the forum a truly open space for participation, it is necessary for all of us to find financial support for those who lack the means to come here.

In closing I would like to bring to your attention a few thoughts regarding the future Forum meetings that have been considered among civil society participants. We have' been wondering about how to strengthen the *output orientation* of the forum and how to ensure that the forum will become also practically relevant.

It has been suggested

- To reduce the number of overarching themes and focus more on specific issues such as capacity building and access.
- Also, the forum should provide sufficient space to get into the details of these issues and
- The forum should encourage the development of practical solutions – both in workshops but also in dynamic coalitions
- Such practical solutions should be put on public records of the forum.
- In so doing, the bottom up process can gain some official recognition, which in turn may make it easier for all stakeholders to participate and learn, to quote Nitin Desai, "holding hands" also in between the annual meetings of the forum.

While it seems unlikely that civil society ever embraces the idea of arranged marriages, all people I have talked to here in the last days see great potential in the forum for developing concrete solutions for the challenges we face in the field of Internet Governance.

Personally I am very proud of having being part of this process. On behalf of the civil society groups I'd like to thank the host country to make this meeting possible, but also the secretariat and the chair for their hard work. We are looking forward to fruitful dialogues, both online and face to face, in the year to come, and in the next forum meeting.