

## Indigenous Family of the Civil Society

### Background - The Special Situation of Indigenous Peoples

## Indigenous Peoples and the Evolution of the Information Society

About 5000 culturally distinct Indigenous Peoples with more than 300 million members provide a vital part of the global cultural diversity. However, Indigenous Peoples generally not only belong to the poorest of the poor, but often are also challenged in their very cultural and physical survival.

In 1994, the International Labour Office (ILO) wrote on their situation:

„With a total population of about 300 million, they [Indigenous peoples] are probably the largest identifiable disadvantaged group. ... They share at least one common condition – they are at the bottom of social indicators in almost every country where they live, placing them among the poorest of the poor [...]. ... Their diversity was once thought to be the cause of their „backwardness“ and poverty, and erasing it was considered the best and only solution. Fortunately, over the past twenty years, the perception of the value, role and future of indigenous and tribal peoples has evolved significantly. ... The principle challenge nowadays is to provide indigenous and tribal peoples with the conditions and opportunities to allow them to benefit, on an equal footing with the rest of society, without losing their diversity, if they wish to retain it. Indigenous and tribal peoples cannot be deprived again of what has been left to them, while getting nothing in return.“ (*International Labour Office: Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the ILO. Geneva 1994*)

With the evolution of the Information Society, this assessment enters into a new dimension. The fundamental transformation of human societies caused by the Information Society on a global scale leaves them with new challenges for their survival as Indigenous Peoples and for the integrity of their cultures.

Knowledge, information and communication are at the core of what is supposed to become the global Information Society. For Indigenous Peoples, their traditional knowledge is the very foundation of their cultures and a core of their identities. It is highly connected to the relationship with their ancestral territories and contains a certain ethics on its use and application. Thus, sharing and disseminating knowledge and information is strongly interrelated with ethical implications and cultural obligations. Often, certain protocols of communication are required to meet these provisions, which are embedded in customary law.

It is therefore imperative for Indigenous Peoples that the Information Society not only serves their needs but ensures their ability to shape their future without risking to lose their cultural identity. Full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the evolution of the Information Society is a prerequisite to achieve this goal.

For these reasons it is necessary to explicitly mention the special situation of Indigenous Peoples in both, the political chapeau and the operational part of the final WSIS documents of the Tunis Summit.