

# **Indigenous ICT Taskforce**

## **Terms of Reference**

## **Part 1 - Preamble:**

Within the deep roots of our Indigenous families is buried a timeless wisdom. This wisdom has kept our peoples self-sustainable for thousands of years. Information is not wisdom. Information is without value if it is not available to those who need it.

Knowledge, combined with the wisdom of our peoples, is what creates true opportunity.

[...]

Indigenous peoples are a valuable part of the information society, and universal connectivity will help us to maintain our values, languages, traditions and sovereignty.

If we do not relate technology to our cultures, and assert our rights to this new digital territory, we believe ICTs will become just another solution in search of a problem.

*(Joe Shirley, Jr., President of the Navajo Nation and member of the IISC, addressing the official WSIS Plenary in Tunis, Nov 18<sup>th</sup> 2005)*

The digital revolution in information and communication technologies has created the platform for a free flow of information, ideas and knowledge across the globe.

The Internet has become an important global resource, a resource that is critical to both the developed world as a business and social tool and the developing world as a passport to equitable participation, as well as economic, social and educational development.

We, the Indigenous Peoples, affirm our right to be part of the global Information Society on our own terms. We therefore emphasize that our participation in building and implementing the Information Society must be based on our right to self-determination and the recognition of our cultural diversity and distinctiveness as Indigenous Peoples. We need to be represented with our own visions, philosophies and concepts in the conceptual framework of the Information Society and any action plan for its implementation. Moreover, our full and effective participation in the evolution of the Information Society must take place in equal partnership with its non-Indigenous actors.

We stress that we have the right to shape our future without the risk of losing our cultural identity. The Information Society and its core elements - knowledge, information, communication and *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICTs) - are cultural concepts and expressions. Accordingly, our own culturally defined approaches, protocols, proceedings and obligations have to be respected by non-Indigenous actors when implementing the Information Society.

Indigenous cultures provide for rules and regulations on communicating, sharing, using and applying traditional knowledge. These rules and regulations are cultural obligations we have to comply with and are part of our own customary laws. Also, future generations are strong rights-holders in our

cultures and our responsibility for their rights and well-being requires us to meet specific obligations on their behalf.

Our cultural obligations towards communicating, sharing, disseminating, using and applying our knowledge have to be legally recognized and respected by the non-Indigenous actors of the Information Society.

The Indigenous ICT Task Force will be a mechanism of Indigenous Peoples to address these issues, to evaluate challenges and opportunities that the Information Society poses to our peoples and to develop our own culturally appropriate approaches and ICT solutions.

## ***Part 2 - Background***

The Indigenous ICT Task Force was born in the context of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

WSIS was the first United Nations Summit that was convened in two phases. WSIS(1) took place from 10-12 December 2003 in Geneva and WSIS(2) from 16 to 18 November 2005 in Tunis.

Generally, WSIS aimed to ensure that the benefits of the Information Society, and particularly the Internet, are accessible to all while promoting specific advantages in areas such as e-commerce, e-governance, e-health, education, literacy, cultural diversity, gender equality, sustainable development and environmental protection.

Indigenous Peoples were involved in both WSIS phases. A small international Indigenous delegation under the umbrella of the *Indigenous Media Network* participated in a number of preparatory meetings to voice Indigenous concerns and aspirations, to work towards including them in the final Summit documents and to establish Indigenous Peoples as a stakeholder in the evolution of the Information Society. The Geneva and Tunis Summits themselves were accompanied by two larger parallel events on Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society, enabling a number of Indigenous representatives to become involved into the political WSIS process.

Due to the efforts of Indigenous Peoples, a special “Indigenous paragraph” was included in the Geneva WSIS Declaration of Principles (Art.15) and the Tunis Commitment (Art.22):

“In the evolution of the Information Society, particular attention must be given to the special situation of Indigenous peoples, as well as to the preservation of their heritage and their cultural legacy.”

This paragraph establishes Indigenous Peoples as a stakeholder in the WSIS process, its implementation and follow-up.

At the Tunisia phase of WSIS Indigenous delegates agreed to establish an Indigenous ICT Taskforce to continue the work of WSIS from an Indigenous point of view.

Cultural diversity in the Information Society, respect for and protection of traditional knowledge, the strengthening of Indigenous cultures and identities through ICTs and Indigenous connectivity should continue to be a focus for discussions at any number of international gatherings, including, but not limited to, the UN Permanent Forum, the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and the Summit of the Americas.

These Terms of Reference seek to guide the formulation of the international Indigenous **ICT** agenda through communications which are open, transparent and culturally appropriate.

It should be understood by all parties that the issues related to participation of Indigenous Peoples in the Information Society and of Indigenous connectivity are still evolving. These Terms of Reference should therefore be viewed as a “work in progress” as further research, dialogues, policies and partnerships are developed.

### ***Part 3 – Mandate and Objectives:***

#### **Mandate of IITF**

1. The IITF was set up by the Indigenous Caucus at the Tunis Summit as an Indigenous mechanism for follow-up the WSIS work.
2. The work of the IITF will be based on the WSIS-related documents, that is those developed by Indigenous Peoples themselves and those adopted by Governments in the Summit proceedings.
3. The IITF will actively seek to inform Indigenous Peoples on a broad scale on the WSIS process and its follow-up
4. The IITF will actively seek partnerships with Governments, UN agencies and NGOs to work on common projects related to the Information Society, and particularly with the goal to prepare for a Global Indigenous ICT Forum in 2007.

The core objectives of the Indigenous ICT Task Force for the fiscal years 2006-07 are to continue the WSIS work, and particularly the work that has been done in Tunis in the following ways:

- Fundraising to host a Global Indigenous ICT Forum no later than November 2007
- Informing Indigenous Peoples on the WSIS process and its follow-up and ensuring a broad Indigenous involvement
- Raising awareness among Indigenous Peoples about the challenges and opportunities posed by the evolving Information Society, particularly with a view to promoting cultural diversity, strengthening

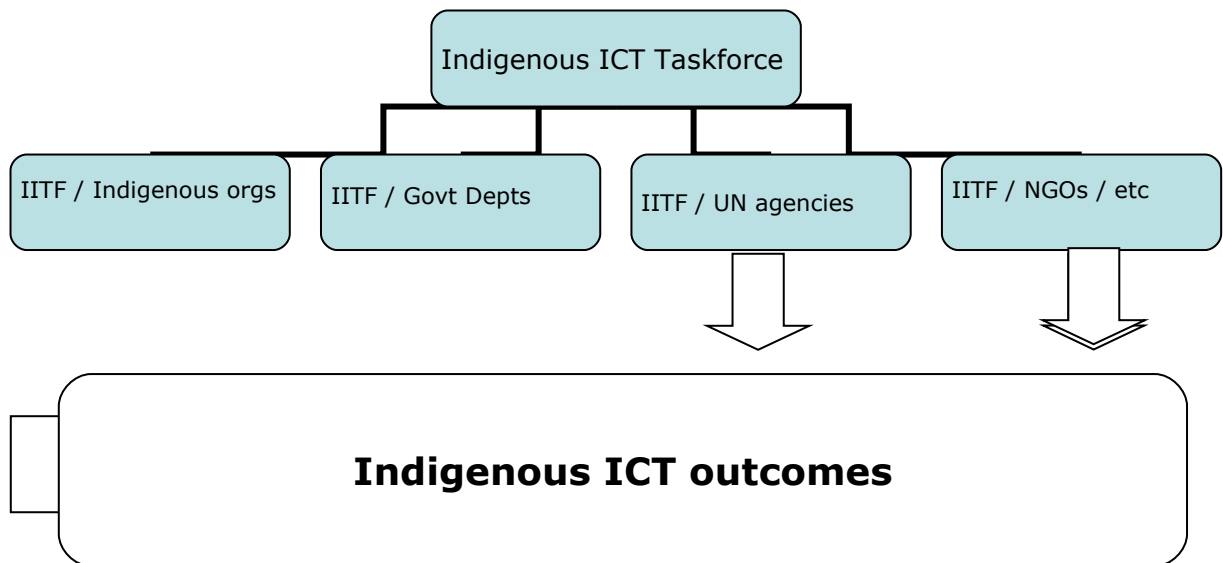
Indigenous cultures and identities and to issues related to unauthorized use, appropriation and exploitation of traditional knowledge

- Developing an international Indigenous Portal
- Elaborating a draft for a Tunis e-strategy to be discussed and adopted at the Global Indigenous ICT Forum
- Finding possibilities for carrying out ICT capacity-building for Indigenous Peoples
- Promoting the development of national and international partnerships
- Promoting the establishment of working groups within the IITF to deal with issues related to the Information Society and ICT utilization

In order to achieve these core objectives, the Indigenous ICT Task Force will need to:

- Identify funding requirements;
  - fund-raising efforts at the local, national, regional and international levels should commence immediately
- Recruit partners and participants;
  - efforts to recruit partners and participants at the local, national, regional and international levels should commence immediately
  - Foster international awareness of the needs and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples with a view to ICTs and connectivity
- Foster and form partnerships and collaborations between Indigenous Peoples and government departments, United Nations agencies, NGOs, the academic community and the private sector in relation to meeting the indigenous outcomes of WSIS.

**Part 4 – Structure of Indigenous ICT Task force:**



**Composition of IITF**

Indigenous participation in the Indigenous ICT Task Force will consist of four (4) members from each of the world regions as recognized by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for a total of twenty-eight (28) members, as follows:

- Africa
- Asia
- North America
- Central/South America and Caribbean
- Pacific
- Former USSR and Eastern Europe
- Arctic

**Part 5 – Methods of Work:**

## Working Structure

The IITF will establish sub-committees or working groups within the Task Force on various issues. The initial sub-committees are:

- Indigenous Portal Sub-Committee
- Capacity-building Sub-Committee

The IITF will actively work towards extending the scope of thematic issues to cover a broad range of issues that are vital for Indigenous Peoples in the context of the evolution of the Information Society.

## Communication between IITC members and organizational tasks

Issues that need to be dealt with by the Indigenous ICT Task Force in the immediate term include:

- Protocols on the use of ICTs ( emails, chat, video conferencing etc ) as forms of communications for the task force
- Frequency of meetings;
- The establishment of a secretariat to support the work of the taskforce
- Delegation of responsibility for fund-raising and recruitment of partners and participants; and,
- The role to be played by groups such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

## ***Part 6 – Term:***

The duration of the draft Terms of Reference of the Indigenous ICT Task Force will be for a period two years or until the Global Indigenous ICT Forum takes place, from November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005. After this period, the Terms of Reference will need to be renewed.