

Delegation from
The Student World Assembly (NGO)

Represented by the
LaGuardia Community College

Position Paper for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

The Student World Assembly (SWA) is a global dialogue NGO devoted to education and promotion of democracy among students from every corner of the world. It is most concerned about access to information/communication technologies by students in developing countries. The SWA mission will not be sustainable unless increasing number of students are able to connect to our website and join our discussion board on pressing global issues and cast their ballots in our surveys. The SWA thinks that a better global future requires a better educated, informed, and civically engaged student body. It aims to provide a vehicle through its “educate, participate, and take action” strategy to involve more and more students globally.

I. Information and Communication Technologies: Narrowing the Digital Divide

The SWA therefore supports all principles and implementing actions that target narrowing the digital divide. In particular, we fully support the main product of the first phase of the *WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action*, adopted in Geneva in December 2003, and the second phase of WSIS that will take place in Tunis, Tunisia, in November 2005. These WSIS plans support concrete “measures [that] will be taken to bridge the digital divide and hasten the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs].” We are also fully supportive of the United Nations MDGs, specifically the 8th one dealing with “Developing a global partnership for development,” which “in cooperation with the private sector [especially ICTs], make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communication technologies” to all.

We are ready to partner with any other NGO, civil society, or educational institution in addressing the digital divide and narrowing it. We believe global democracy, and thus a safer world, depends on hastening the bridging of this divide. We have donated laptops to centers in Afghanistan and Ghana, and have paid for the Internet Café fee in Nigeria to facilitate our members’ access to the Internet.

II. Cultural Identity in the Information Society

The SWA is an organization that does not discriminate on any basis--nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, or religion. It has members from all continents (1700 members from 90 countries and 125 educational institutions). The SWA welcomes diversity of perspectives in all its forms and encourages involvement of diverse groups in all its mediums, events, activities, programs as well as in its leadership team.

The SWA does not regard the enlargement of the Information Society (the growth of the Internet, development of cellular technologies, TV and radio broadcasts) as obstructing or

diminishing the cultural diversity. The SWA does not feel that technologies like the Internet impose one identity on all its users. On the contrary, the existence of mediums through which people from all over the world can acquaint with a variety with cultures, languages, customs and alternative perspectives on different issues is beneficial to everyone.

The SWA therefore wishes to stimulate the participation of people from all over the world in the Informational Society. It encourages the proliferation of ideas, exchange of perspectives or “the rubbing of the minds” as one SWA member from Nigeria put it. The SWA endorses the use of all languages in the Information Society.

In accordance to the above-mentioned principles, the SWA deplores any action by a government, international organization, business firm, etc., that encumbers the cultural distinctiveness of the Informational Society (in all its forms).

III. Transparency in Governance through ICTs

The SWA advocates democratic governance and transparency in all global institutions and collaborations, including the ones dealing with access to information society and closing the digital divide. The SWA fully endorses the work of the ICT Task Force (including its publication *Internet Governance: A Grand Collaboration*) that was established by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan “to help identify ways to harness the potential of ICT for economic and social development by promoting partnerships of public, private, non-profit and civil society stakeholders to advance the global effort to bridge the digital divide.”

True global social, economic and political development, especially in the South, will not materialize without achieving the noble vision of a global information society that construes a governance structure that is “multilateral, transparent and democratic with the full involvement of all stakeholders.” The SWA deplores over-commercialization of the Internet and its dominance by the North. The SWA’s aim of “promoting global democracy, one student at a time” will not succeed unless increasing number of students from all over the world can afford to connect to the Internet.