INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL POUR LA SCIENCE

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04/12/2002

Mr Yoshio Utsumi
Secretary General
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Place des Nations
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Dear Mr Utsumi,

Second Meeting of the Preparatory Committee, World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva, February 2003

Thank you for your letter of 21 October, inviting specific proposals on actions to be included in the Declaration or Plan of Action for the WSIS. I enclose by way of introduction to the following response, a statement which I made on behalf of the International Council for Science (ICSU), at the first PrepCom meeting in July. This speech summarises why ICSU believes that the full participation of the Science community at all stages of the WSIS process must be ensured if the Summit is truly to deliver a better and more inclusive information society. ICSU's mission is to support international science for the benefit of society. ICSU, in partnership with the WFEO, was the major representative of the international S&T Community for the recent WSSD in Johannesburg. We are pleased to offer our knowledge and experience to contribute in a similar manner, in relation to the WSIS.

With specific regard to the draft declaration and/or action plan on which you invited comments, I would like to make the following brief points:

1. There is no specific mention of science *per se* in the current draft set of principles and themes. This is an unfortunate omission. Scientific research is perhaps the most important factor underpinning the development of the information society itself. The fundamental components of the Information Society: electricity, radio waves, the www and the browser were all first developed in academic laboratories. Furthermore, in order to fully understand the interactions between humans and new information technologies, one has to utilise the expertise of the social scientists, psychologists and economists. Scientific research leads to both the development of new technologies themselves and an understanding of how these technologies might be best deployed for the benefit of society. **The central role of science and scientists should be clearly acknowledged in the declaration of principles and reflected in the plan of action**.

2. At the WSSD in Johannesburg there was general acceptance of the notion of "knowledge as a public good". In this context, strengthening of the public

domain for research data and information, particularly on the internet, is of paramount importance. The crucial role of science in helping to provide the knowledge that is necessary for society to address the Millenium goals can only be achieved if the principles of universal and open access to scientific data and information are enshrined in international agreements.

3. Provision of adequate infrastructure is an obligatory step in overcoming the digital divide and the ultimate aim should, of course, be completely universal and equitable access to data and information. However, there is a key role for Universities and higher education and research institutes in building the endogenous capacity and knowledge that is necessary for the development of every nation and for global society as a whole. In this regard, an immediate priority should be to ensure the necessary ICT infrastructure and connectivity to these 'knowledge and training centres' in all countries. High priority should also be put on the establishment and maintenance of libraries and archives (digital and paper) in these institutions, to ensure the future dissemination and preservation of knowledge within communities.

4. The digital divide, or more appropriately the knowledge divide, can only be overcome if local scientific capacity is strengthened in developing countries. This is a shared responsibility of the international science community, local and national governments and other stakeholders. Better infrastructure is a necessary but not adequate condition for overcoming the divide.

With regard to the general themes that are proposed in the note of the informal meeting of sub-committee 2 of Prepcom I of WSIS, there are several for which the input of the scientific community will be important. I understand that these, or similar themes, will be discussed in 'round-tables' and subsequently in the formal plenary sessions at PrepCom II. We (i.e. ICSU and other partner NGOs, representing the S&T community) would be pleased to contribute to the following areas in particular:

I. "[Universal and equitable] access to information……..": ICSU, together with UNESCO and the US National Academy of Sciences, is already planning a major international symposium on 'Open Access and the Public Domain in Digital Data and Information for Science' in March 2003 to which the ITU/WSIS Secretariat will be invited.

II. "Capacity Building: human resources, development education and training": see 4 above, this is a crucial topic for the international scientific community and one where we have considerable experience to share and build upon;

III. "Promotion of development oriented ICT applications for all….." topics such as health, environment, prevention and early warning systems – all of which were highlighted in Johannesburg – depend on scientific data and information.

IV. "[enabling [a local, regional, national and international] environment notably…….codes of conduct": this is linked to universal access. ICSU has recently been very involved in monitoring various legislative developments

which are potentially a major threat to the public domain for scientific data and we could make a useful contribution on this. There is an established ethos of international data sharing and exchange within the scientific community and there are many examples where this 'openness' has been crucial to scientific advances of direct benefit to society.

V. "Identifying and overcoming barriers to the achievement of the information society with a human perspective" – a contribution from the social sciences and/or psychologists on the organisational context for the introduction of ICTs or human-computer interfaces could be very valuable in-put here.

ICSU would be happy to arrange for contributions from the science community at PrepCom II on some or all of these themes. However, in order to do so most effectively I would need to know as soon as possible what the requirements are.

Looking further ahead to the Summit meeting itself in Geneva in December, ICSU would be pleased to consider an invitation to organise or coordinate a scientific event in association with that meeting, should such an event be considered appropriate. In this regard we would be pleased to work with other non-governmental and governmental partners. This might include representatives of the engineering and University sectors with whom we are already working on Information Society issues. We performed a similar role in Johannesburg in organising and coordinating, what was generally acknowledged to be a successful and influential series of events from the S&T community. In proposing this I would again emphasise the importance that ICSU attaches to maximising the use of science for the benefit of society.

I look forward to hearing from you as to how best ICSU might contribute to PrepCom II and help in ensuring the success of the WSIS.

Yours sincerely,

Carthage Smith
Deputy Executive Director

Enc.

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