

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Report of the conference on “Towards a code of good practice building on the principles of WSIS and the Aarhus Convention”

A Stakeholder Consultation on Public Participation in Internet Governance, ITU, 23 May 2008, Geneva.

The consultation entitled “Towards a code of good practice building on the principles of WSIS and the Aarhus Convention” was organized jointly by UNECE, the Council of Europe and the Association for Progressive Communication (APC).

The meeting was attended by participants from APC, the Council of Europe, the UNECE Secretariat, the Internet Governance Forum Secretariat, London School of Economics, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) as well as several other organizations and individual participants.

The objective of the consultation was to present and discuss an exploratory report on the concept and possible scope of a “Code of Good Practice on Participation, Access to Information and Transparency in Internet Governance” which had been written by Professor David Souter.

The meeting was opened by the Chief of the Trade Policy and Governmental Cooperation Section of the UNECE, Mr. Hans Armfelt Hansell. He mentioned that the report written by Professor Souter was based on the experience from the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

Ms. Anriette Esterhuysen, the Executive Director of the Association for Progressive Communications chaired the meeting. She welcomed the participants and introduced the topic.

Ms. Karen Banks, a Member of Working Group on Internet Governance and Network Development Manager from APC spoke about the cooperation developed among different organizations during the last 2-3 years based on Aarhus Convention principles. This cooperation aims, in particular, to allow access for people to decision-making and to promote the transparency of this process.

Dr. Michael Remmert, Project Manager of the Directorate General of Democracy and Political Affairs of Council of Europe reminded the participants of the Council of Europe’s activities related to democracy and talked about public participation issues in the IG.

Professor David Souter from the Department of Communication and Media of London School of Economics presented his report. He suggested the elaboration of a “code of good practice” and that the Aarhus Convention may serve as a benchmark and offer the experience to develop such a practice. He discussed the WSIS principles, the Aarhus Convention principles, and accessibility of public to information in the multilateral, transparent and democratic management of Internet.

Mr. Chengetai Masango, Programme and Technology Manager of the Secretariat of the Internet Governance Forum welcomed the transparency of the process and suggested that Internet Governance could benefit from the experience of the Aarhus Convention.

Mr. Michael Stanley-Jones, Environmental Affairs Officer of UNECE highlighted that global developments regarding principle 10 of the Rio Declaration have continued to take place in a variety of bodies, including United Nations organs, multilateral environmental agreements, international financial institutions and civil society groups.

Ms. Fiona Marshall, International Institute for Sustainable Development of Geneva introduced the Almaty Guidelines on promoting the application of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international fora. She explained that these Guidelines serve to facilitate the Convention’s implementation with regard to access to information and public participation in decision-making on environmental matters.

Dr. William Drake, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies made an overview of multi-stakeholder participation in Internet Governance.

In the ensuing discussion the purpose and scope of the proposed code was discussed and its possible opportunities, limitations and risks analyzed. Related initiatives in the field of Internet Governance, such as participatory issues, human rights including freedom of expression, content control, as well as the proposed Internet Bill of Rights, were also discussed and analyzed with respect to their compatibility with the proposed code. In supporting the initiative the representative from ECA discussed how the principles could be applied to his region.

In the conclusion of the Conference it was agreed that the Internet Governance landscape is diverse and the development of a code is a long-term process. However, it was emphasized that there is a strong interest to continue the process and to hear the inputs from different entities interested in the topic. One method could be to enter into dialogue with entities involved in the process through a mapping exercise. It was also envisaged that a paper could be submitted to the third Internet Governance Forum suggesting a roadmap for how the process could be progressed.