

**WSIS Civil Society Closing Press Conference**  
**Declaration by Meryem Marzouki**  
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More than three years ago, in July 2002, the WSIS Civil society Human rights caucus has been set up with three objectives:

1. Putting Human Rights on the WSIS agenda and affirming their centrality in the information society
2. Developing detailed contributions on how Human rights can be precisely translated within the information society framework
3. Raising awareness of all WSIS participants and, beyond, the general public, on the importance of addressing Human rights in the information society,

At the end of the Geneva phase, we were already deploring that the Declaration of principles only includes a reference to the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and that it was devoid of any mechanism to concretely implement the respect for human rights in this context. Two years later, no progress has been made with this regard, and **the human rights caucus has to reiterate its main demand, also brought by Ms. Shirin Ebadi during the opening ceremony of the Tunis phase. This demand is the establishment, at the United Nations level, an independent commission on the Information Society and Human Rights, composed of highly qualified experts with a broad geographical representation, to monitor national and regional practices and policies on human rights and the information society.**

As a human rights caucus, we have dealt with the substance of WSIS commitments as well as with the WSIS process. This process has been too often characterized by the reign of the arbitrary under the pressure of some governments. One the caucus members, the Ngo Human Rights in China, has been denied WSIS accreditation for administrative reasons, following procedural maneuvers by the People Republic of China's government. On the other hand, numerous GONGOs (Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations) have obtained their accreditation without any problem, when they were not registered under the ECOSOC status. These GONGOs, especially the Tunisian ones, have never stopped disrupting the work of civil society groups, particularly of the human rights caucus. **Therefore, the human rights caucus calls the United Nations to establish procedural safeguards, to end this reign of the arbitrary. This especially applies to ECOSOC accreditation rules, as well as to specific UN conferences.** We commend the United Nations, and particularly its Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan's willing to adopt a more civil society inclusive policy. However, these efforts will go unheeded as long as civil society accreditation is decided by governments only, without any control by independent commissions and without right of appeal.

Finally, we cannot keep silent regarding the extreme difficulties due to the holding of the WSIS second phase in Tunisia. The human rights caucus has particularly experienced them during this whole second phase. There three days of November in Tunis have reached a point of no return, with the escalation of violence and repression that we have witnessed against our Tunisian partners and that we have even experienced ourselves. In solidarity with our Tunisian partners of the independent Tunisian civil society, the caucus, together with more than 100 international NGOS, has planned to organize a Citizen' Summit on the Information Society, in order to discuss WSIS issues from a civil society perspective. The holding of this

Citizen's summit has been prevented using the most violent means and the most shameful pressures. **We are forced to state, together with observers from the entire world, that what has been possible to achieve in Beijing in 1995, as a side-event of the UN Conference on Women, has been forbidden to happen in Tunis in 2005, as a side-event of the UN Summit on the Information Society. The human rights caucus calls all the medias, governments, civil society, and more generally all WSIS participants and observers to remain vigilant on the situation in Tunisia after WSIS.**

From the early step of the WSIS process, the human rights caucus has put its work in the perspective of the universality and interdependence of all human rights, civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development. Thirty years after the debate on the New World Information and Communication Order, ten years after the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, the Tunisian government, as well as some other governments, still dare to oppose the development issue to the human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy issue. **The human rights caucus considers that the Tunisian government not only has missed a unique opportunity to raise the respect for human rights at the level of the country's results in economic and social sector, but also that it is in the process of squandering achievements of the people of Tunisia in this field, following a control and censorship policy which stifles creativity. We remain convinced that there could be no development without democracy, and no democracy without development.**

WSIS CS Human Rights Caucus Website: [www.iris.sgdg.org/actions/smsi/hr-wsis](http://www.iris.sgdg.org/actions/smsi/hr-wsis)