



WSIS FORUM 2009 18–22 May 2009, Geneva

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In 2003 and 2005, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) brought together governments, international organizations, IT professionals and civil society to create a framework for a global information society that would be equitable to all. Four outcome documents established a common vision, key principles, objectives, goals and targets. The WSIS Forum 2009 was one of a series of annual follow-up meetings helping to assess progress and develop strategies to reach the WSIS targets. Among the issues IFUW's representatives followed at the 2009 Forum were the protection of children online and e-learning.

Protection of Children On-line

Children and young adults today are the generation of the World Wide Web. They have been raised in the age of the internet and are often more adept at navigating the online world than most adults. Unfortunately, this poses numerous threats to children who do not possess the judgment to recognize and deal with online predators, improper content, and potential exploitation. In the past ten years the number of internet users has increased from 186 million to 1.5 billion. In the same period Interpol saw reports of child abuse material grow from twelve per year to 1.5 million. Children and adults must learn to be more media literate together in order to have the safest online experience possible and countries must continue to develop and enforce safe internet policy.

Michael Moran, a criminal intelligence officer at Interpol, the largest international police organization, talked about a special database Interpol has created to help stop child exploitation. All explicit online images of children that are reported to regional Interpol offices are stored in a locked database and analyzed in an attempt to identify perpetrators and locations. The database has helped to identify numerous exploited children across the globe. An image reported in Africa can help to save an exploited child from Canada. Moran urged anyone who comes across an image of an exploited child to contribute to the database.

Young girls exploring their sexuality in a very public, online atmosphere, instead of in a safe private environment, are particularly at risk. They have the technology to upload pictures and video onto the web. In these instances the girl is both the victim and the perpetrator. Self-exploitation through the posting of explicit material is dangerous and can lead to arrest.

Efforts are being made on both the national and international levels to protect children online. Groups such as InSafe, Europe's safety awareness network, are organizing open dialogues where youth can talk about online safety and awareness, as well as online threats and online bullying. Safer Internet Day is organized by InSafe each year in February, with thousands of initiatives and events held throughout Europe to help children and young people understand

the risks online and take measure to protect themselves, whether from hackers, viruses, cyberbullies or online strangers that may want to harm them.

On the international level, WSIS has drafted Child Online Protection Guidelines to create an international standard for online protection. The guidelines stress the classification of content and services in order to control what kind of content is appropriate for what age. It also looks at how content is provided and what parental responsibility entails. The draft guidelines can be viewed at <http://www.itu.int/osg/csd/cybersecurity/gca/cop/guidelines/index.html>. The final guidelines will be presented at the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Telecom in October 2009.

E-learning

The field of education is changing rapidly because of the widespread development of the World Wide Web. Information is readily available and can be accessed more quickly than ever before. As a result of this development, memorized knowledge is becoming less important, while on demand access to networks of information plays an increasingly more important role. The future of education and development for girls and women is online.

These new developments pose problems in the very rural areas of the world. A representative from Cameroon commented that, while his village has access to mobile technology as well as the internet, it is not useful because there is not enough content in the language his village speaks. He stressed the need to improve online content and make the internet more globally inclusive.

Literacy and online skills are necessary in order to take full advantage of available information. The literacy gender gap and the technological skills gender gap put women at a disadvantage in the online world. Greater investment by private corporations is needed to develop new methods of online education to help close the gap and stimulate the world economy.

Only 18 % of experts in the technological field are women, so many of the private sector projects are focusing on increasing interest in math and science amongst young girls. One example is the Nokia M4Girls pilot programme in South Africa. The program was created to improve the mathematical skills of young girls using mobile technology. Girls in two South African schools were each given a Nokia mobile phone with access to mathematical learning games. The results are promising.

The World Summit on the Information Society encourages people to join the WSIS community online. It is free to register, and is a tool that will increase communication and networking in this field. In order to join, go to www.wsis-community.org.

Resources:

WSIS Homepage – <http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html>

WSIS Outcome Documents – http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=2316

Child Protection Guidelines - <http://www.itu.int/osg/csd/cybersecurity/gca/cop/guidelines/index.html>

M4Girls - <http://www.nokia.com/A4971236>

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June 2009*