

Politics and Diplomacy: Business Experience with WSIS from Geneva to Tunis

Maria Livanos Cattau

Secretary-General, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have become essential vectors of development and economic growth. No country, rich or poor, at any stage of its development, can afford to ignore the vital role of ICTs nor any aspect of the Information Society. It is equally clear that the integration of ICTs and the promotion of an information society for all require the driving forces of business. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held in Geneva in 2003, underscored how an appropriate enabling environment for investment and conditions that promote innovation and entrepreneurship allow business and ICTs to become this driving force in development. Critical components of the fundamental building blocks of the Information Society can only be put in place with the involvement of business in aspects of the diplomatic and political issues at all levels – national, regional and international.

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the voice of worldwide business, brought together the collective global experience of companies and business associations to form the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors, or CCBI.¹ The business leaders speaking at the Summit in Geneva and the CCBI-led events highlighted that ICTs indeed act as a stimulus for development by bringing competition into the markets, attracting investment, both foreign and local, and by creating more affordable and greater consumer choices. By taking the necessary steps to integrate ICTs in the economy and by removing obstacles, entrepreneurship and innovation are enhanced, thus creating jobs and stimulating economic growth and social development.

¹ See <http://www.businessatwsis.net> and http://www.iccwbo.org/home/menu_electronic_business.asp, for more information about ICC and CCBI's activities and substantive inputs to the WSIS Geneva, 2003 and WSIS Tunis, 2005.

The Summit in Geneva also brought to the forefront the key role that business has in making the integration of ICTs a reality. Many of the sensitive and difficult issues cannot be addressed effectively unless business is part of the solution process. Including business in the work done by the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM) and the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) has been critical. Business will not only be responsible for the “health” of the sectors involved but also for implementing the development possibilities. Thus, it is most welcomed and significant that business has been an integral part of the processes involved in addressing these two issues. Innovative and long-term approaches and solutions will be needed, for which business support, involvement and investment are clearly essential.

The future of ICTs and the Internet depends on business taking part in all discussions so that, in partnership with others, their full potential can be realized. As proposals for WSIS are revised and debated, rejected and expanded, as the clamour of often conflicting interest groups in defence of their various agendas reaches a crescendo, a fundamental reality cannot be ignored: only the private sector can deliver the Information Society on any significant scale and to the benefit of people everywhere.