The 5th Internet Governance Forum: "Vilnius 2010"
UNESCO's Open Forum
16 September, 16:15-18:15
Litexpo, room 4

Opening

Mr Jānis Kārkliņš, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information (ADG/CI), UNESCO, opened the session by welcoming seven panelists and 60-70 participants to UNESCO's Open Forum.

Mr Kārkliņš highlighted that UNESCO already organized two workshops dedicated to the Freedom of Expression and to Privacy issues, and that this UNESCO Open Forum will therefore be dedicated to other key IGF topics: multilingualism in cyberspace, Open Educational Resources (OER), Open Access to scientific information (OA), Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) and accessibility for marginalized groups.

Introductory remarks

The Chair explained that Mr Desai could not attend this Forum, because had to chair the plenary session which was initially scheduled to take place in the morning. ADG/CI then introduced the **Mr Beckstrom**, CEO and President of ICANN, who in his introductory remarks explained how the recent changes in the Internationalized Domain Name system, including ICANN's fast track process, made it possible for users to navigate online entirely in their own language in Russian (Cyrillic), some Arabic, Chinese, Sinhalese, Tamil and Thai scripts, so that billions more can now access the Internet using only their primary language script. Mr Beckstrom also expressed his satisfaction about the cooperation agreement with UNESCO, and the signature -just 30minutes before the meeting- of a joint Letter of Intent. It states, that ICANN will support UNESCO in developing a non-binding IDN ccTLD Cyrillic country names / abbreviations reference table.

Session 1: Multilingualism in cyberspace

Mr Baher Esmat, Manager, Regional Relations – Middle East, ICANN, complemented Mr. Beckstrom's statement by explaining what it means in concrete terms that Egypt successfully applied for its ccTLD. Besides being convenient in practical terms (e.g. not having to change keyboard scripts while typing an URL), this development will be really important for future Internet users, who do not master the English language or Latin script. Users will be able to navigate in Egyptian language only through the Internet in the future.

Mr Daniel Pimienta, President of FUNREDES (Fundacion Redes y Desarrollo) Saint Domingue, Dominican Republic, presented findings of a UNESCO sponsored study entitled "Twelve years of measuring linguistic diversity in the Internet: balance and perspectives", published in French and English in 2009. He presented impressive figures, showing that of some 40,000 former languages, some 6,000 still exist, that every two months one disappears – and that Google works in 45 languages only… He also showed that English is the dominant language, but that in terms of internet users the Chinese user base is getting quite close (roughly 2/3) to the English user base. A central thesis of this presentation was also that the digital divide is much deeper in terms of contents, than in terms of access today.

Session 2: Open access to scientific information and open educational resources

Mr Indrajit Banerjee, Director, Information Society Division, UNESCO introduced the UNESCO's Open Suite initiative. He highlighted UNESCO's innovative work in the area of Open Educational Resources (OERs), building on former achievements like the Open Training Platform. A second dimension of the Open Suite is the work on Open Access (OA) to scientific information, with a particular focus on OA journals and repositories for developing county universities, for think tanks and research institutions. The work started with a global mapping exercise, and will continue with awareness raising and capacity building activities. Third dimension of UNESCO's Open Suite strategy is the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) portal, building on internationally recognized UNESCO FOSS projects (Greenstone, Koha, AtoM). Besides a portal upgrade, the work will also consist in the promotion of the development and use of Open standards in IT infrastructures and content.

Mr. Abel Packer, Director of the SciELO.org Open Access (OA) initiative and one of UNESCO's partners in this work, introduced SciELO and its pioneering work. This network, which operates in English, Portuguese and Spanish, has witnessed tremendous growth in terms of number of titles it made accessible in 1997 (10) until 2008 (533 titles). This has been possible through fruitful partnerships and geographic expansion. SciELO's strategy to improve the quality of journals through online OA publishing relies on 6 pillars: visibility, accessibility, quality, credibility, use and impact. The number of downloads of articles has increased only over the last 5 years from 1mio. Downloads per month to some 14 million downloads only in the month of May 2010. Mr Packer also discussed challenges, such as the sustainability of the business model (which should move towards a sustainable public-private mix), institutional, national and international policies, but also just keeping pace with the technological innovations.

Session 3: Developing inclusive information policies using ICTs in education for persons with disabilities

Mr Axel Leblois, Executive Director, the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communications Technologies G3ict), presented the Advocacy Initiative of the United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development. He started with a powerful statement of a disabled person, Dr. Zhang Xu, speaking about the Internet: "If anybody asks me what the Internet means to me, I will tell him without hesitation: To me (a quadriplegic) the Internet occupies the most important part in my life. It is my feet that can take me to any part of the world; it is my hands which help me to accomplish my work; it is my best friend – it gives my life meaning." Mr Leblois showed that, depending on definitions, in between 10-18% of the world population have disabilities, he spoke about the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it's implications of ICT accessibility, but also the challenges to assess progress in the light of few available accessibility statistics. The way forward is to enhance measurement, build capacities of policymakers, develop tools and curricula for educators and mainstream ICT accessibility, including in UNESCO's work.

Dr. Anja Kovacs, from the Centre for Internet and Society (India), spoke about ICT enabled education initiatives for persons with disabilities in the Asia Pacific region. A survey was developed and case studies undertaken in China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan,

Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Preliminary observations included that Disability Specific Legislations exist in all the ten countries, and that Constitutional Provisions recognising education as a fundamental right exist in China, Philippines, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Republic of Korea. Specific Education Policies for people with disabilities exist in: China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Republic Korea. Many more findings were shared, including for example that the Copyright Acts in none of the ten countries have fair use provisions, with the exception of Japan. Japan allows free reproduction for visually and aurally handicapped.

The session was held in an interactive format, which allowed for questions and comments by the participants after every presentation.

Mr Kārkliņš closed by thanking panelists and participants for their active presentation and expressed his intention to hold another UNESCO Open Forum at the sixth IGF, in view of the interest and active participation in this event.