



Ulla Tørnæs' tale ved FN-forbundets konference "Where to go from Tunis?"

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Thank you for the invitation to speak at today's conference on: "Where to go from Tunis?" - it is a highly relevant question to ask after the WSIS Summit last November in Tunis.

In my mind, it is not simply enough that we meet at high political level at Summits and agree on a number of international goals and objectives.

The real task is to implement these goals through an effective follow-up. This is the real test of the commitment reached at any Summit - and the WSIS Summit in Tunis is no exception.

The single most important subject of this Summit concerned Internet governance. This will not be the focus of my statement today.

However, let me give you just a few words on the Danish position. In short, Denmark believes that the private sector and civil society should continue to have the lead role in the development of the Internet – to the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments alike.

We therefore have to find a way to ensure true legitimacy to the governance system without jeopardising further development of the Internet.

What is needed is a governance system at the international level, which cannot introduce any form of content control, but which can protect the core infrastructure of the Internet. From the Danish side, we will continue to be very active in the dialogue on Internet governance.

Let me now turn to the focus of my statement: the importance of information and communication technologies for development.

The overall results from Tunis are well known to all of you. We were able to reach a compromise that was acceptable to all parties.

One of the results, I would like to highlight is the link between the WSIS process and the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals. In my eyes that sends an important signal on the significance of information technology for development.

Furthermore, the EU also worked hard to secure the distinctive feature of the WSIS - the multi-stakeholder approach - in order to secure the participation of civil society and the private sector.

I will not go into an analysis of the full results of the Summits.

Instead, I would like to focus on how these results can be realised in practice. Or in other words, how we take the Tunis agenda forward.

The bottom line is that each nation – rich or poor - must integrate the development of the information society in its national agenda.

In particular, developing countries have an important task in integrating their national e-strategies with national poverty reduction strategies.

A strong national determination is necessary in order to lift a poor country into the modern world of information technology. The developing countries own priorities should always be the point of departure. Otherwise, development will not be sustainable in the long run.

In order to support the developing countries, official development assistance is needed in a number of fields.

It is already a strong feature in Danish development cooperation. And no doubt, it will be even stronger in the future. A primary role for donors and the civil society will be to ensure that poor and remote populations are not excluded

Today, it is difficult to find a single development project or program supported by Denmark that does not in some form use information and communication technology. However, the utilisation of new technologies is not a goal in itself.

The goal is to combat poverty. Information technology acts as a catalyst for growth and development.

So what are the experiences with ICT in our Danish development programmes? How do we intend to follow-up on the WSIS Summit?

Let me give you five examples of what we have done in practice in the administration of Danish development aid. Or in other words, what we have done to change the mind set of people, and to open their eyes for the full spectrum of possibilities embedded in modern technology.

First of all, we have developed an entire “tool kit” containing detailed procedures, guidelines and tools for integrating ICT into Danish sector programmes in cooperation with our national development partners.

This tool kit has been widely discussed with Danish civil society organisations and experts involved in the WSIS process. The aim of the tool kit is not to introduce ICT as a new crosscutting issue in Danish development aid, but rather to offer specific guidance to DANIDA personal, advisors and other relevant personnel on how to effectively use ICT in a variety of sector

programmes.

That brings me to my second example since a defining feature of this tool kit is the creation and continuous development of a so-called ICT for Development (ICT4D) “Good Practices” portal (www.danida-networks.dk).

This portal is an innovative way of promoting exchange of ideas and information to inspire good ICT practices in Danish sector programme support. Among other useful information, the portal contains lessons learnt and recommendations for mainstreaming ICT in the sectors of agriculture, education, health and business.

Thirdly, Denmark has - as the first and so far only donor country - made its entire extensive tool kits on development assistance available for the general public on the internet via the website: “Aid Management Guidelines”. (www.amg.um.dk).

The AMG-website serves a useful double purpose. On the one hand, it ensures wide-ranging donor transparency regarding development practices. On the other hand, it facilitates free and unlimited access to a collection of well-tested and well-tried development policies, strategies and technical guidelines.

Fourthly, Denmark also promotes ICT through multilateral channels, as our active engagement in the multiyear WSIS process – in cooperation with Danish civil society - bears witness to. Following the Tunis Summit last November, we have also intensified our cooperation with “Bellanet” – an international organisation promoting communication and exchange of information in development work through the use of ICT and the Internet.

Fifthly, a precondition for the use of ICT is access to information and education. Lack of education holds captive a vastness of suffering in many developing countries. Denmark has therefore launched five new education programmes with special focus on Africa. The use of ICT in creating knowledge sharing and learning is crucial in making the next generation able to benefit from the unprecedented access to information and knowledge.

These five examples illustrate how we have tried to move the WSIS agenda forward in practice.

Let me round up my statement today with a few words on why I see it as so crucial that we stay focused on the WSIS agenda.

For me there are two good and interconnected answers to that question.

First of all, I believe the WSIS agenda provides an important dimension to our quest to find new ways to combat poverty.

We need to highlight the role of information technologies more – also in our development assistance. We need to change the mind set of people – not just the next generation, but also this generation of aid workers. The Summit in Tunis did take us in the right direction, but there is still a lot to be done.

Secondly, I believe the WSIS agenda provides an important contribution in avoiding that developing countries are marginalized in globalisation.

To actively engage in the information society is a crucial feature of a successful

globalisation strategy – also for the poorest countries. We must make the information society all-inclusive.

The challenge is in this regard no doubt greatest in African countries.

We cannot accept if the African continent falls behind in the information society we all live in. We cannot accept if a large African population is excluded from the benefits we are all enjoying in our rich part of the world.

A strong focus on Africa lies at the heart of Denmark's development assistance. And no doubt, there will be a need for more development aid to Africa if we are to lift Africa into the Information age.

We should clearly recognise that access to information and sharing and creation of knowledge contributes significantly to strengthening economic, social and cultural development, and thereby helping all countries to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

The Tunis Summit did help raise awareness of the benefits that information and communication technologies can bring to humanity. The real challenge now is to stay focused.

Here I would like to conclude with the words of the UN Secretary General at the WSIS Summit:

“We must now get down to the specifics of implementation, and set out ways to foster and expand digital opportunities”. I hope the years to come will testify to that development.

One thing is certain. If we are to reach our goal there is a need for an active contribution on all parts:

From governments, from the private sector and from the civil society. We should continue to work in partnership to reach our common ultimate goal - to combat poverty.

Thank you.

Tags

Politisk tale, Venstre

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