

STATEMENT BY
FREE SOFTWARE FOUNDATION EUROPE (FSFE)
AT THE
INTER-SESSIONAL, INTER-GOVERNMENTAL
MEETING ON A
DEVELOPMENT AGENDA FOR WIPO
(Geneva, 11-13 April 2005)

Mr. Chairman,
my congratulations to you and your distinguished colleagues for having been entrusted with chairing this very important IIM. I speak on behalf of the Free Software Foundation Europe, which has been following the discussions around the establishment of a Development Agenda with great interest. We thank all countries for their contributions and would in particular like to commend the Friends of Development on their very thoughtful and deep proposal.

Software is the medium that defines and structures the digital domain. Cultural techniques, such as agriculture, reading and writing have been essential to evolutionary steps of humankind. Software is the digital cultural technique upon which the information age will rest. Access to software determines who may participate in a digital society.

During the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society in December 2003 in Geneva, the Member States jointly adopted that “equitable and affordable access to ICT infrastructure and services” is one of the challenges the United Nations face, and that “Connectivity is a central enabling agent in building the Information Society.” Standards and software models were identified as cornerstones in the pursuit of the inclusive, developed Information Society.

A recent study from the Fraunhofer Institute in Germany showed that 80% of all German exports depend on Information and Communication Technologies. Because of this central nature of software, lack of interoperability and a lack of competitiveness act to the detriment of the entire national economies of all Member States. In recognition of this fact, the UN Member States at the WSIS adopted that “Standardization is one of the essential building blocks of the Information Society.”

As recent cases have shown, traditional reactive antitrust instruments are often incapable of matching the rapid pace of ICT evolution. A more pro-active approach is required. As such, freely implementable, publicly documented standards are one of the few known and proven tools to protect interoperability and competition.

We therefore call upon WIPO to include in its policies effective measures to ensure that software standards be freely implementable and publicly documented.

Mr. Chairman,
as was adopted and endorsed at the WSIS, choice of software model is another important component of the Information Society. Its Plan of Action therefore encouraged research and called on all Member States to promote awareness for the effects of the different software models. Building upon Copyright, the global movement for software freedom has spent the past 20 years providing a model that protects competition, interoperability and sustainable development.

Equitable participation requires equal access and control, it requires independence from the particular interests of foreign states and entities. Today, only the Free Software model grants equal rights and freedoms to all Member States, their corporations and citizens.

WIPO should therefore make sure that all its activities are fully accessible and available with Free Software and include Free Software in its technical assistance activities.

Mr. Chairman,
The model of Free Software has played a crucial role in the current dawn of the information age, such as the invention and rise of the internet. If by some magic Free Software were to disappear, so would the internet. By using the Copyright system itself to mitigate some of its restrictions, Free Software is the living proof that more monopolies and more restrictions do not always mean more economic or innovative activity.

We explicitly support the Friends of Development in their statement that no tool should ever be promoted for its own sake and should therefore be beyond review. FSFE supports the proposal to establish a permanent dialog that pro-actively seeks alternative forms of encouraging intellectual activity while monitoring and adjusting the existing toolset of granting limited intellectual monopolies to best meet the requirements of human development.

Essential building blocks of human creativity, such as access to knowledge and freedom to participate in society and economy should once again become the norm, not the exception.

Mr. Chairman,
it is the declared goal of WIPO to “create real wealth for nations.” This IIM can be the first step towards WIPO meeting the needs of being a true “World Intellectual Wealth Organisation” of the Information Society. We consider this a unique chance and will be glad to contribute to this process in any way we can.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

*The Statement was delivered by Mr. Georg C.F. Greve <greve@fsfeurope.org>
Free Software Foundation Europe, President
UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS),
Civil Society Patents, Copyrights, Trademarks (PCT) Working Group, Co-Coordinator
European Caucus, Coordinator
First phase Civil Society representative, German Governmental Delegation
Expert for Software, Copyright and the Internet for UK IPR Commission, 2001*