UNESCO Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development
Informal Consultation on "Internet Universality" Concept

UNESCO's Freedom of Expression and Media Development Division is kick-starting work on a new concept: "**Internet Universality**". At this preliminary stage, UNESCO is seeking input from the WSIS community to feed conceptual work on this notion. An outcome may be a document to present at the Internet Governance Forum 2013.

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"Internet Universality" is an over-arching concept whose rich potential calls out to be explored. It recognises that the Internet is becoming a near-universal reality, starting with physical access and extending deep into the economic, cultural, social and societal aspects of its actual use. Today the focus is increasingly on dynamic applications – as in e-health, political advocacy, m-learning, data-journalism, etc. The Internet's pervasiveness has accelerated the flow of communication and the pace of history. Its character of enabling information access internationally has also profoundly changed the model of our societies and how individuals interact with one another. "Internet Universality" points to this wide-ranging significance of the Net.

Further, the concept recognizes that while these changes are open-ended in some ways, the Internet is also not the product of mere chance. Instead, it is based upon very specific values, social and economic conditions, and technology choices, all of which emerged from the open architecture of the underlying technology and the associated culture of participation. Significantly, these foundations of the Internet are broadly in line with the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It can be said that human rights, and especially freedom of expression, are organic to the nature of the Internet as it has evolved.

In this light, the concept of "Internet Universality" could be understood as a heuristic to highlight the interdependence of the components of this uniquely open ecosystem – the normative, technical, social, etc. As part of this, it can also help to emphasize continued harmony between the growth and use of the Internet and human rights. This comprehensiveness suggests that this umbrella concept could have value for all communities of interest – intergovernmental, governmental, technical, business, civil society and media, for example.

For UNESCO in particular, "Internet Universality" in the sense of a free, rights-based, open, and accessible Internet, could possibly serve as a frame for the full range of the Organization's Internet-related work in education, culture, science and communication-information. The concept gives context to WSIS' designation of UNESCO as Action Line Facilitator for "Ethical dimensions of the information society" (C10) & "Media" (C9). Especially in the light of its inclusion of the right of free expression and the free flow of information, "Internet Universality" can be understood as a central means to achieving Knowledge Societies.

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Taking advantage of the world-class experts gathered for the WSIS+10 review, we invite all interested participants to share their thoughts on the concept of "**Internet Universality**", by sending their contributions (300 words maximum) by 8 April to c.bommelaer@unesco.org