

**STATEMENT BY THE
FREE SOFTWARE FOUNDATION EUROPE (FSFE)
TO THE
CONSULTATIONS ON THE CONVENING OF THE
INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM
(Geneva, 16-17 February 2006)**

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

I speak in my capacity as president of the Free Software Foundation Europe, a European non-governmental organisation dedicated to all aspects of Free Software, as defined by the four fundamental freedoms specified in the Free Software Definition. We operate in a network of sister organisations in Latin America, India, Europe and the United States and work in close cooperation with the global Free Software community.

We have been following the discussion with great interest and in the interest of moving forward would like to offer a few comments on what we heard so far. Firstly, though, let me congratulate and thank you and Mr Kummer on the meeting and the open and inclusive spirit in which it was convened. We hope this will be maintained for future sessions.

One of the terms we heard rather frequently in this debate was multilingualism, alas, we are somewhat at a loss as to the concrete definition of this term. Private discussions throughout the past day and a half seem to have turned up various meanings and definitions that had little in common and were in fact at times contradictory.

In the field of software, most people would probably understand it as localisation of the software itself in order to make the software talk to each of its users in their own language.

Since Free Software and in particular its freedom of modification permits all groups to adapt the software to their own cultural environment, this has been a major driving force for adoption of Free Software in many parts of the world, especially many developing countries, which are often not considered interesting enough markets for major proprietary software vendors.

You will thus not be surprised if I of course fully embrace the importance of multilingualism. If we plan for the IGF to come to concrete and successful outcomes, it does however seem necessary to come to a common understanding of what that term is actually supposed to mean.

Spam is another issue on the minds of many delegations.

In our experience, Spam is not so much a technical, but fundamentally a social and economic problem. Most of the technological remedies we have seen proposed in the past would do very little to address the issue of Spam, but raise a serious issue of interoperability.

Several delegations pointed out that the internet has a close relation to the principles of interoperability and freedom. The connection between Free Software and its principles and the internet is indeed not circumstantial: if one takes a look at the history of networks, one will find a list of proprietary approaches to build something like the internet, which failed without exception. It took Free Software to make the internet work.

Spam remedies we have seen suggested by major industry vendors require discarding the very principles that made the internet possible, and it would be tragic indeed if attempts at regulating Spam were to undo what we all have come to depend on.

We therefore consider it necessary for the IGF to establish for itself a set basic principles that will uphold and strengthen the foundations on which the internet was built. These principles should in particular ensure freedom and interoperability on a fundamental level, as a common ground on which to implement the principles agreed upon during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Regarding the tools discussed to continue the forum online between sessions, I wish to emphasise the importance of practicing what we preach. All IGF online resources should be fully accessible to all users, including those with disabilities, and put effective use of bandwidth high on its list of priorities to avoid excluding participants in regions with limited internet access.

The Free Software community has a long standing experience in ensuring participation and collaboration across cultural, language and connectivity barriers and gladly offers its expertise to the process.

As a final and very concrete remark, let me suggest that for future sessions on the IGF, the very basic and necessary facilities of those who wish to use the internet will be provided in future sessions. I observed a serious power struggle going on in this room, and it is not about politics.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

Statement 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

First phase Civil Society representative, German Governmental Delegation

<http://fsfeurope.org>