

Report of the joint ITU/EBU workshop on:  
"Global Internet Access for Persons with Disabilities" Workshop no. 110  
organized by  
the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU)  
IGF, Internet Governance Forum, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, 16 November 2009

## Introduction

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), in collaboration with the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability (DCAD) organized a workshop at the 4<sup>th</sup> Internet Governance Forum (IGF) meeting on "Global Internet Access for Persons with Disabilities" on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009, in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

The workshop was organized as an activity of the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability (DCAD) and the European Broadcasting Union. The workshop highlighted the different aspects on how to make the internet accessible for persons with disabilities. The workshop pointed out the necessity to make the Internet accessible to all, regardless of individual capabilities of different users.

Organizations that are members of DCAD include, among others: the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), SKID, Council of Europe, Digital Accessible Information System Consortium (DAISY Consortium), Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (G3ict), the Indian Centre for Internet & Society, International Center for Disability Resources on the Internet (ICDRI), Internet Society (ISOC), Internet Society Argentina (ISOC-AR), UNESCO, Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C).

## Goal of the workshop

In 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which obliges its signatories to provide public information in formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities. The ITU, as the world's pre-eminent global ICT standards organization, is embracing the challenges of accessibility through standardization efforts and has long championed the principles of inclusion and Universal Design enshrined in the UN Convention.

This workshop explored several objectives and the main ones can be described as follows:

- Spread knowledge and increase the awareness of the work being carried out in ITU in the field of accessibility to the ICTs;
- Give visibility to the work being done in the field of accessibility to the ICTs;
- Highlight the necessity to make the Internet accessible to all, regardless of individual capabilities of different users;
- Promote awareness on accessibility at different levels within the United Nations system and other International Organizations to implement accessibility and encourage its implementation in their daily work.

## Programme

The keynote address was given by **Malcolm Johnson**, Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, ITU. The TSB Director underlined that a momentum is building for initiatives that allow persons with disabilities to take their rightful place in society. Malcolm Johnson stated that industry and governments need to understand that persons with disabilities not only need to be included but have a right to be included in the new technological achievements and advances of our time. This is especially important for developing countries that look to the developed world and to ITU for guidance.

The panel of the workshop consisted of 9 speakers as follows:

- **Andrea Saks**, DCAD Coordinator:  
"Introduction: What are the key issues, plan, and purposes of the Session"
- **Arnoud Van Wijk**, Real-Time Text Taskforce (R3TF):  
"Real-Time Text, a major leap forward for accessible internet for people who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing"
- **Arun Mehta**, Special Kid (SKID):  
"Challenges for those with mental disabilities"

- **David Wood**, European Broadcasting Union (EBU):  
"I am not alone': Internet media content for people with disabilities"
- **Dipendra Manocha**, Daisy Consortium:  
"Daisy Consortium, Digital Accessible information System for persons with print disabilities and on-line libraries"
- **Cynthia Waddell**, International Centre for Disability Resources on the Internet:  
"What is the UN Convention? How does it impact the Internet"
- **Nirmita Narasimhan**, Center for Internet and Society:  
"Accessibility Policy making - An international perspective"
- **Fernando Botelho**, Botelho & Paula Consultoria:  
"Public-Private Partnerships for Low and No-Cost Assistive Technologies"
- **Gerard Ellis**, Feel The Benefit:  
"The Economic Imperative of Social Inclusion"

The Moderator was **Jonathan Charles**, BBC World.

The panel was divided in different parts describing several issues, namely, *what are the access challenges to meet, the Media content for persons with disabilities, the UN Convention for Persons with disabilities and the specific measures that can be taken in order to implement accessibility*. The panelists, mainly DCAD representatives spoke and presented the different issues related to the global access to the internet from the point of view of the persons with disabilities. Some of the strategies that governments can adopt to ensure a thriving assistive technology marketplace and affordable products were presented. Another presentation investigated, from the point of view of a disabled user of ICTs, the economic benefit of including the needs of people with disabilities in technological products and services. People with disabilities and older people gain disproportionately from the inclusion of the Universal Design, but that all stakeholders benefit.

## Conclusions

It is expected that the UN Convention will make assistive ICT technologies as common as wheelchair ramps and audible signals for traffic lights. Assistive technologies include screen readers (which read content from websites out loud for the visually impaired), captioning or sign language on television for the deaf, cell phones that include features such as special volume control, large character touch pads and predictive text features and auditory SMS messages for the blind as well as the adoption of accessible website design by both the public and private sectors. Finding solutions to these challenges is not always a simple matter. On the one hand, equipment and software is now available that provides amazing breakthroughs for people with disabilities. On the other hand, there are many barriers to finding the most appropriate equipment, particularly at affordable prices.

The workshop was captioned.

All the material and the presentations are available on the ITU-T website at the following address:  
<http://www.itu.int/ITU-T/worksem/accessibility/20091116/index.html>