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In conversation with Daniel Stauffacher, Chairman, ICT4Peace Foundation

September 2007

1. The ICT4Peace Foundation was born out of the WSIS process. Where does it stand now and what have you achieved since it was set up?

I think the main achievement in the short period of time of operational activities so far has been, besides to obtain a minimum of funding for the work of the foundation, to get the political approval that Paragraph 36 of the WSIS Tunis Commitment is now also an integral part of the WSIS follow-up in accordance of the Geneva Plan of Action (Action line C11) and thus part of the ECOSOC WSIS reporting and follow-up mechanisms. The UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs in New York has invited the ICT4Peace Foundation to become the lead partner for the implementation under Action line 11. In addition we were able to have Paragraph 36 also recognized as a priority area of the Global Alliance for ICT4Development. Here again the Foundation has been invited to lead the community of expertise of GAID.

2. Where is ICT4Peace today? Has the promise of Tunis and in particular Paragraph 36 lived up to expectations?

Honestly we have still a long way to go. We are only at the beginning, particularly if we compare with other fields of the information society, i.e. eHealth, eEducation, ICT4D etc. But the lets not forget, Paragraph 36 was only approved at WSIS in Tunis by the Heads of States at the end of 2005.

3. What have been some of the key challenges that you have had to overcome to promote ICT4Peace?

People are often cynical and get suspicious when you start to talk about peace and conflict prevention. You can be perceived to be a peace-nick, or they are afraid, you want to interfere in the internal affairs of their countries. That is why it was so encouraging when the WSIS unanimously approved Paragraph 36. Developing and developed countries alike approved this most important legal instrument, which did not exist before at a Summit level. It is now much more difficult bring about the changes that we hoped for.

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4. How do you define ICT4Peace?

Very simply: ICTs are a tool and not an end in itself. These tools can help tremendously all those actors, be they Governments, I.O.s, NGos, Business, Media to do a better job in wha they try to do anyway: early warning, prevention, mediation, post conflict reconstruction and peace building. Of course ICT4Peace has to be closely coordinated with ICT4Development.

5. What particular aspect of ICT4Peace do you feel the Foundation can best support?

I think we can make the best contribution as a think tank, carrying out targeted networking, original research, policy development and advocacy at the highest political level. Only in limited cases we will support actively concrete projects on the ground.

6. The world over conflict is increasing and peace seems to be diminishing. How do you feel technology can help in conflict resolution & transformation?

I am not sure if you are statistically right. I understand the number of have conflicts have diminished. Having said that, I also have the impression things get worse globally. ICTs and here include all forms of media, however – and this has been proven - can make an enormous contribution to the better understanding among peoples, improve the effectiveness the role of the media, improve the human rights situation, improve the operations of peace building and reconstruction operations and thus saving more lives and resources.

7. Technology is a tool, but the political will is lacking. How do you see this statement as one that captures the reality facing global policy making today?

I think it has partly still to do with a generational gap between the political leaders and the new generation of ICT savvy actors. Therefore ICT has not been given the importance and ressources it deserves and needed to make a difference.

8. As a Swiss, do you feel the Foundation and you are uniquely positioned to enter as neutrals into a peace process? What value do you think you bring because of this perception?

For some people the Swiss neutrality might still be an important factor, but much less that in previous years. I think more important is the credibility that Switzerland has acquired as the host of the first World Summit on Information Society in Geneva 2003, while simultaneously Geneva being the home of international humanitarian law and many Humanitarian Organisations and NGOs.

9. Recently a meeting held in Geneva discussed at a high level the need to share information within and between key stakeholders involved in humanitarian relief work and peace

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building. Much has been said of this issue, but why do you feel so little has been achieved?

Frankly I do not know. It seems so obvious. One reason is that many actors and decision makers have not yet understood the power of ICTs. On the other hand peacebuilding and humanitarian work that are sustainable are probably the most complex issues and areas of action. Much more complex and difficult than sustainable development for instance. So people shy away. The risks are high, that things are politicized. Also in ICT and peace building you need that people work together, that usually do not work together: Military, NGOs, UN etc.

10. **Coming back to the Foundation, where do you see the Foundation in 5 years?**

In an ideal scenario the Foundation will become obsolete, as it will have achieved its objectives. I believe organisations are there for a purpose, and when the objectives are achieved, organisations can be closed down. But we should not be naive. In terms of peace we will still have a long way to go. With regards to the role of ICT and media for peace we might indeed have some progress. As we are still a small group of convinced today I expect the Foundation, together with CMI and infoshare will have made a considerable contribution in creating a network of convinced actors, in creating awareness and have pushed the policy agenda to such an extent, that we will see some real operational improvements on the ground.

11. **What supports this vision of yours for the Foundation?**

I believe, that many of our shortcomings in using ICTs for Peace are founded in a generational gap. Many of to-day's decision makers have not grown up with ICT and/or basically do not understand their potential. This will change. A good example is Googles latest contribution in allowing a satellite view on the situation in Darfur. More and more business leaders, but also Governments under pressure want or are pressed to address the big questions of conflict and peace. The cost of conflicts to society has become too high, and do not get support or enjoy complacency as in the past.

12. **Do you believe that the better use of technology can strengthen peace processes to the extent that there will be more peace 5 years hence than today?**

Yes indeed. ICTs and in particular web 2.0 will create even more transparency and efficient tools for actors in the field of conflict prevention, mediation, conflict resolution and peace building.

13. **What would be the quantitative and qualitative yardsticks you would use to measure the impact ICT4Peace has had on peace building?**

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This is a very difficult question. I am not sure, that we always can establish a clear cause and effect relation between the various factors and the outcomes. But let me try with a few examples of progress or success: All UN lead post conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding operations will have as part of their standard operational preparations mandatory procedures and checklists on the use of ICTs. Similarly, when these operations are evaluated by the UN and donors, that as a standard the question on how ICTs have been used in the operation will be asked, and the reports will include always a chapter in this regard.

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Daniel was in conversation with Sanjana Hattotuwa (sanjanahattotuwa@ict4peace.org) a Senior Advisor to the Foundation and also a leading ICT4Peace thinker and practioner.