

## **Information about the suitability of Parminder Jeet Singh for the role as civil society member of the UN Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation (on Internet-related public policy issues)**

### ***Part 1 - Short Bio***

#### ***General background***

Parminder is Executive Director of IT for Change, an India based NGO, in Special Consultative Status with UN's Economic and Social Council. This Special Status has been granted to IT for Change for its work at the global level on Information Society issues at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and thereafter.

IT for Change's core mandate is to work at the intersection of new ICTs and progressive social change, from the standpoint of equity and social justice. The interests of marginalised sections, including women, remain IT for Change's key focus. IT for Change is widely acknowledged to be a key actor bringing representation of voices from the South, and those generally of marginalised sections, to global forums on information society and Internet governance. IT for Change works in a range of developmental sectors – chiefly, governance, gender, education and community informatics. It has extensive partnerships and networks with a diverse set of development actors in all these areas, both at the national and global level. Many of these networks have been built and developed by IT for Change. **It is from such a hands-on experience in different sectors of development, and trusted relations with diverse actors in each sector, that IT for Change forms its perspectives on various Internet governance (IG) issues and brings them to global forums.** A detailed account of IT for Change's work is available in its [annual reports](#).

Parminder leads IT for Change's work in the area of governance and community informatics, and has been its main representative in IG spaces at the global and national levels. He has led various field projects and research projects in the areas of community informatics, ICTs for development and e-governance. He has written extensively on these subjects in books, journals etc. **Parminder has been on the advisory committee of the UN Global Alliance on ICTs and Development.**

#### ***In the Internet Governance Space***

IT for Change is now quite well known for bringing Southern perspectives to global Internet governance discussions. It has participated and held workshops in all the seven UN Internet Governance Forums (IGFs) held till now. IT for Change formed a 'Dynamic Coalition on Framework of Principles' at the first IGF in Athens. Later, this coalition merged with the coalition on Internet Rights to form the Dynamic Coalition on Internet Rights and Principles. Parminder is a member of the steering committee of the group.

**Parminder was the first elected co-coordinator of the Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus, the premier global civil society network dealing with IG issues.** He has closely and intensely participated in the Caucus' activities since the WSIS. He was selected as a **Special Advisor to the Chair of the UN IGF** in 2008, in which position he served for 3 years. He was **one of the five civil society representatives on the Commission on Science and Technology for Development's (CSTD) Working Group on Improvements to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).**

During his coordinatorship of the IGC, Parminder was instrumental in developing a proposal along with the Dynamic Coalition on Internet Rights to make human rights as the overall theme of the IGF.

He has consistently argued for the indivisibility of human rights and that social and economic rights are as important as civil and political rights, and hence that civil society's approach be informed by the whole gamut of recognised human rights. **Parminder played an important part in developing the 'Charter of Internet Rights and Principles'** and the shorter document of '10 Internet Rights and Principles' put forward by the Dynamic Coalition on Internet Rights and Principles. IT for Change also held a workshop on 'Right to Access the Internet' at the 3rd IGF in Hyderabad, and has advocated that right to access the Internet should be recognised as a basic right.

## **Part 2 -A brief outline of IT for Change's and Parminder's engagements in the area of Enhanced Cooperation**

IT for Change has been one of the most active voices post WSIS, seeking progress on the WSIS mandate of 'Enhanced Cooperation'. Prof. Wolfgang Kleinwächter, one of the most prominent global IG actors, had this to say when Parminder's term as IGC co-coordinator ended in 2008, ***“The simple fact that Critical Internet Resources (CIR) is now a fully accepted subject of discussion for the IGF, goes also back to Parminder’s never ending critical questions with regard to Enhanced Co-operation (EC) & CIR”.***

After the WSIS, there was a danger that the 'Enhanced Cooperation' track would simply disappear because of its active obscuration by those favoring continuation of the status quo in global Internet governance. In order to counter this deliberate inaction, IT for Change convinced the Internet Governance Caucus to propose a workshop on Enhanced Cooperation at the third IGF in 2008 in Hyderabad, with Parminder taking the lead within the IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) and outside, to advocate for it. Due to strong resistance of pro-status quo actors, the workshop request was initially refused. However, Parminder remained steadfast in his efforts, and convinced some developing countries to back the proposal within the MAG. In fact, so successful was his effort that the subject of 'Enhanced Cooperation' was taken up by a plenary session in the 2008 IGF, with Parminder among the panelists. **This was how the important issue of 'Enhanced Cooperation' was brought back to mainstream global discourse, after its disappearance since the closing days of WSIS where this agenda had initially been framed.**

At the CSTD's annual session in 2010, for the first time, [IT for Change proposed](#) that an open consultation should be held on the issue of 'Enhanced Cooperation', a view which was accepted by the Commission. Such a consultation was held by the UN Department on Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in December 2010. **At the same session of CSTD, IT for Change suggested that Enhanced Cooperation and the Internet Governance Forum should be considered 'two distinct but complementary' processes.** This was suggested to confront the effort by certain pro status-quo actors who had begun to conflate the two processes, which were clearly two distinct mandates from the WSIS. Again this proposal of IT for Change was accepted and the 'distinct but complementary' phrase entered the UN General Assembly resolution. The importance of this phrase can be judged from the fact that the UNDESA Chief in his closing remarks observed that the UN General Assembly has clearly stated that EC and IGF are two distinct processes, and *therefore* he needs to do something specifically on the EC mandate. This statement was made in face of the proposition put forward by many actors at the UNDESA open consultation on EC that there is no need for a separate EC process when the IGF already exists. This was the second major role played by IT for Change in keeping the 'enhanced cooperation' agenda alive, in the face of many efforts to make it disappear.

[At the UNDESA open consultations, IT for Change asked for](#) a new body to deal with global Internet related public policies. This body was modeled exactly on an OECD body with a similar role within the OECD. Therefore, in essence, what the statement asked for was merely that since the Internet is global, rather than just have OECD do *global* Internet policies, a body with representation from all countries should do exactly what the OECD's Internet body was doing at present. In our statement to the consultations, we also identified some key global Internet related public policy issues. At the same open consultations, India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) made a joint statement laying out some key global Internet policy issues, and asking for a 'new or existing' UN body to look into these. The Brazilian government representative acknowledged to IT for Change in an email that the IBSA statement had taken important elements and inspiration from IT for Change's statement. **It was at these open consultations that IT for Change became the first actor to call for a CSTD Working Group to be set up on the issue of Enhanced Cooperation.**

IT for Change kept up the pressure at the CSTD meeting in 2011 and then the UN General Assembly meeting in 2011 to move forward by setting up a CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation. However, as expected, there was considerable resistance to this demand, which was now coming from most developing countries. At its 2011 session, UN General Assembly did not agree for a CSTD Working Group but asked the Chair of the CSTD to hold another open consultation on 'Enhanced Cooperation' in May 2012.

Meanwhile, IT for Change undertook strong advocacy with developing country actors – both governmental and non-governmental, to get them to appreciate the importance of developing country participation in global IG decisions. Along with another civil society group from Brazil, **IT for Change was instrumental in organising the first ever workshop of IBSA actors – governmental and non-governmental, to look at global IG issues from a Southern perspective.** This meeting took place in Rio de Janeiro in September, 2011. IT for Change prepared a background paper for the meeting, titled '[A Development Agenda in Internet Governance](#)', which laid out key global Internet policy issues and possible institutional options for dealing with them. The government representatives from the three countries met after this meeting and decided to work closely together on the issue of 'Enhanced Cooperation'. They came out with a joint statement called the '[Rio Recommendation](#)'. (Unlike what is mentioned in the document, this document was an agreement only among the three country representatives and not a consensus reached among all participants of the Rio workshop.) Building on the Rio Recommendations, India proposed to the UN General Assembly in October, 2011, that a new UN body, to be named Committee on Internet Related Policies (CIRP), should take up the role of 'Enhanced Cooperation'. India also asked for a working group to be set up on the issue of 'Enhanced Cooperation'.

**An open consultation on 'Enhanced Cooperation' was held on May 18th, 2012 in Geneva, and Parminder was invited to address the consultations as a part of the opening panel. [Here, he highlighted](#) that there was not much disagreement on the need to do something on global Internet public policy issues, but disagreement really was about the process. He further pointed that the real disagreement about the process pertained to the role that different stakeholders should play in the development of Internet related global public policies, and therefore it would be best to discuss this core issue first.**

**Parminder was also invited to address the annual CSTD session on the subject of 'Enhanced Cooperation'.** Here, Parminder [made a new proposal](#) to treat the subject of 'Enhanced Cooperation' as two different streams, de-linking the institutional proposals made for each stream. These two streams

are (1) oversight of Critical Internet Resources, which was the more contentious issue, and (2) dealing with larger social, economic and cultural public policy issues related to the Internet. Accordingly, he also advised India to reconsider its CIRP proposal, and focus only on these other/ larger non-CIR public policy issues. To deal with CIR oversight, a separate institutional proposal may be developed.

In the run up to these important meetings on the issue of 'Enhanced Cooperation', IT for Change did an important campaign for 'democratising global Internet governance'. **This [campaign](#) was supported by over 60 civil society organisations and many more individuals, from across the world.** This campaign also found a positive mention in the [joint press release](#) issued by UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights and UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression on the eve of the CSTD open consultations on 'Enhanced Cooperation'.

In April 2012, the inter-governmental body of developing countries, the **South Centre, invited Parminder to [address developing country delegates](#) on the matter of the upcoming CSTD open consultations on 'Enhanced Cooperation'.**

IT for Change kept up its advocacy efforts with some major actors involved with the process right up to the UN General Assembly resolution in December 2012 when the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation was finally set up.

It may also be mentioned that Parminder has often and regularly initiated, what have turned out to be, rich discussions on the subject of Enhanced Cooperation on the list of Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus. Many of these discussions involved new proposals to move forward on the subject of 'Enhanced Cooperation', including proposals for civil society to take a lead in this matter. It is still his principal argument that **in such a period of apparently unsurmountable difference among state actors on what is the best institutional architecture for global IG, it is for civil society to provide the right proposals that can break the deadlock.** IT for Change seeks to carry out its efforts in this direction, now that a platform in the form of CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation has been formed to consider new proposals for the appropriate institutional framework for global IG. Through Parminder's nomination to the CSTD Working Group, it hopes to make significant contributions in the architecture of global IG.

### **Part 3 - Why Parminder will be a good Civil Society representative on the WG**

Much of the answer to this question is contained in the above write up. Parminder is recognised to have strong working relationship with all major actors in the global IG space – especially civil society and governmental actors from developing countries. It is these latter actors from developing countries who are most vocal about democratizing global IG spaces, which is what the issue of 'Enhanced Cooperation' to a good extent is all about. The extent of networking and trust that IT for Change has among progressive civil society actors is evident from the very large number of actors which supported [IT for Change's campaign on 'democratizing global IG'](#). The above narrative also makes it clear that many developing country governments also lay good store by IT for Change's opinions in this area.

In any case, the global deadlock on 'enhanced cooperation' can only be broken by proposing new possibilities, that are based on globally-agreed higher principles of equity, social justice, democracy and human rights. Parminder has been remarkably active in proposing new possibilities that could help different actors move forward on the contentious issue of 'Enhanced Cooperation'.

Parminder has a close understanding of the processes of the UN system and other global governance institutions, as would be obvious from the numerous 'successful' contributions made by him to various negotiated texts. For instance, during the 2010 CSTD inter-sessional, it was his contribution that was instrumental in breaking the deadlock over the status of non-governmental participants in CSTD Working Group on Improvements of the IGF.

Parminder also has an astute sense of how different positions may need to be accommodated in multi-stakeholder negotiations, and hence adept at putting forward new proposals that can help discussions to move forward. This may be evident from numerous discussions on global IG issues that have taken place on the IGC list. During his time as co-coordinator of the IGC, although IT for Change has strong positions on most IG topics, Parminder was able to develop numerous texts that the IGC could adopt by consensus, and which still contained strong substantive elements.

IT for Change and Parminder have consistently taken positions that represent the interests of the most marginalised and have stood up to defend and pursue these positions to their logical ends. IT for Change's positions are based on canons of equity, human rights, social justice and democracy. IT for Change remains unwavering and uncompromising in its commitments to these basic principles.

#### ***Part 4 - Communication with civil society constituencies***

As mentioned earlier, IT for Change is acutely conscious that its legitimacy derives from the networks of civil society actors that it works with. The very basis of such a networking based work approach, which is central to IT for Change's thinking, is to keep up a continuous two-way communication with all the involved actors.

Parminder has always communicated to various civil society actors both plain facts and deeper nuances about what happens in the committees that he represents civil society on. All of IT for Change's positions, outside as well as inside committees, are based on its stated standpoints and perspectives, which themselves get developed through a networked process of continuous engagement and consultation. IT for Change believes that every element of its actions, positions etc are open to be questioned by anyone, and IT for Change undertakes to respond to each of such questions in full detail. Parminder has also advocated consistently that all civil society actors must submit to such open questioning on all their actions and positions taken, and respond fully to every public question that is asked in this regard.

Since such is the specific requirement of this call for nominations, we have once again obtained an assurance from Parminder that there will be no slackness in our ever present commitment to keep up close communication with all civil society networks, including the IGC, on all aspects of the Working Group on EC, in case he is indeed selected to be on it. **Parminder also commits to giving the time that will be needed to attend the multiple meetings of the WG in Geneva.**