Report on participation in the High Level Asia-Pacific Conference for the World Summit on the Information Society held in Tehran from 31st May - 2nd June 2005

Background:

The Asia Pacific Regional WSIS conference held in Tehran was the culmination of the pre-Tunis regional WSIS process in the Asia Pacific. This process began with a regional conference in Tokyo in 2003, taken forward through a regional conference in Bangkok in 2004, following which four sub-regional conferences were held. UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) was the main organizer of all these conferences.

I reached Tehran on 27th May and flew out on 3rd June. The reason for going in early was of non-availability of tickets on the later dates.

Activities:

- Met and understood the position and strategies of civil society activists of Iran who were boycotting the conference. Shared our strategy for the conference, and explained why we chose to attend even though they had given out a call for a CS boycott.
- Studied the draft documents to be adopted by the conference and gave a detailed CS response calling for the rejection of the draft.
- Interacted with Iranian CS members who attended the conference. Held regular CS meetings along with them and developed CS strategy and intervention plans.
- Made many interventions during the plenary about exclusion of CS form conference processes.
- Lobbied with government delegates for endorsing CS position.

Outputs

- A detailed CS response to conference documents, which earned the appreciation of many participants.
- Inputs to drafts of conference document.
- Closer links with the Iranian CS that had boycotted the conference.
- Links with Iranian CS which attended, and chance to build their capacity to engage with IS/WSIS issues with the governments.
- A lot of concessions were extracted from the organizers for greater inclusion of CS in conference processes, and later, in other regional WSIS processes.
- Circulated report on conference and other CS documents to Asia Pacific civil society for information, discussion, and building capacity on IS/WSIS issues.
- Developed closer interaction with Asia Pacific CS actors who attended the conference, and those who participated in list discussions etc.

Any follow up/recommendations/conclusions for CRIS Campaign:

The capacity of civil society in Asia Pacific – especially in countries like Iran which hosted the conference – needs to built for engaging with IS/WSIS issues. In absence of such capacities governments are able to carry forward their agenda of sidelining issues that CS generally advocates for and/or are able to get away with simple laziness and non-engagement with issues of great importance to the people of Asia-Pacific.

There was a marked difference between the earlier Asia Pacific WSIS conference in Tokyo in 2003 where CS was involved in organizing the event quite early and this conference where CS had to practically force its way in. And it showed on the output of the event.