



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

UNU-MERIT

Keizer Karelplein 19
6211 TC Maastricht
The Netherlands
Tel + 31 43 3884400
Fax + 31 43 388 4499
E-mail info@merit.unu.edu

Website www.merit.unu.edu

For immediate release

16 May 2008

UN Think Tank Urges Legislators to Support “Open Source” Information Technologies, Software

***Participation in, not just access to, the “information society”
essential to developing countries, competition***

News Release

United Nations University-MERIT experts yesterday in Geneva urged parliamentarians to support open source software and information technologies as a way to let citizens participate meaningfully in the information society.

“Open source” refers to a public domain method of software development. UNU-MERIT is a joint research and training centre of UNU and Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

UNU-MERIT researcher Rishab Aiyer Ghosh urged policymakers to consider information and communications technologies from a social rather than technical viewpoint. He said access to the information society must be provided to all citizens, without requiring them to first become customers of particular proprietary companies.

"Participation in, not just access to, the information society is important" Ghosh told the UN event, attended by members of parliament from over 40 countries. "Open source software gives people fishing rods, not just fish."

“The main issue here is a plea for open standards as they guarantee competition,” says Prof. Luc Soete, Director of Maastricht-based UNU-MERIT, underlining the importance of this topic to the Institute’s work. Recently published UNU-MERIT studies demonstrate the strong role of open source software in skills development.

Other panelists at the session on "Ensuring equitable access" included Nikhil Kumar, Member of the Indian Parliament; Hannes Astok, Member of the Estonian Parliament, and Hanne Agersnap, Member of the Danish Parliament.

The event, titled, “Shaping the Information Society: The Role of Parliaments and Legislators,” was organized by The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The conference programme can be downloaded at: <http://ictparliament.org/parliamentaryforum/>.

UNU-MERIT's participation in this event is part of an engagement with policymakers to increase awareness of the potential for open standards for transparency, democracy and good governance in a participatory information society.

As part of a new EU-funded project, FLOSSINCLUDE, UNU-MERIT has launched an initiative to improve the ability of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to contribute to open source as active participants and developers, rather than just users. This initiative will also provide for South-South sharing of best practices and experiences on open standards.

About UNU-MERIT

[UNU-MERIT](#) is the United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and social Research and training Centre on Innovation and Technology. Located in Maastricht, The Netherlands, UNU-MERIT is a joint research and training centre of United Nations University - based in Tokyo, Japan, and Maastricht University. UNU-MERIT provides insights into the social, political and economic contexts within which innovation and technological change is created, adapted, selected, diffused, and improved upon. The Institute's research and training programmes address a broad range of relevant policy questions dealing with the national and international governance of innovation, intellectual property protection, and knowledge creation and diffusion.

Rishab Ghosh heads the Collaborative Creativity Group at UNU-MERIT, a leading research group on open source software, open content, and collaborative creativity and innovation. For more information, visit the programme website at: <http://ccg.merit.unu.edu/>

For more information please contact:

Wangu Mwangi
Communications Coordinator,
UNU-MERIT
Tel: +31-43 388-4465
Email: mwangi@merit.unu.edu