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Volunteers disagree over the issue of poor countries' access to new technologies

The Forum's "141 Questions" (102): "The Technology Breech: the Last Obstacle?" Mercè Brugués, a volunteer at Asociación Coordinadora de Ayuda Unida (ACAU), stressed that new

technologies are of little use to those who suffer the consequences of hunger and lack basic healthcare. Viola Krebs, a member of ICVolunteers, however, argued that the major needs of poor countries should not be argued to the detriment of providing them with access to new technologies that are capable of spurring on their economic growth.

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Mercè Brugués, a volunteer at Asociación Coordinadora de Ayuda Unida (ACAU), which is currently working on establishing a shelter for abandoned children in Burkina Faso; and, Viola Krebs, a member of ICVolunteers and Oficina de la Sociedad Civil de la Cumbre Mundial sobre la Sociedad de la Información, expressed their disparate opinions about what the consequences would be if poor countries had access to new technologies today at the Haima Stage. Mercè Brugués admitted that any technological progress is useful, but insisted on the fact that "first basic needs such as food, health and education need to be addressed." Viola Krebs admitted that hunger and insufficient healthcare infrastructure should be top priority, but also pointed out that the grave situation suffered by these countries should not condemn them to a being marginalized from new technologies: "The problems burdening Africa will not be solved if we leave them behind in terms of technological progress," she stated.

Mercè Brugués stated that, "it is necessary to take it step by step" because it does not make sense to provide technical means to children and young people who have no education at all: "Were will we plug in the computers if there is no electricity?" she asked. Viola Krebs said that there are major differences between urban and rural life: "In Dakar there are more cyber cafes than there are here because the people don't have computers at home; of the twenty books a student needs, only one can be found at the library, but they are all available for consultation over the Internet." As a member of the Oficina de la Sociedad Civil de la Cumbre Mundial sobre la Sociedad de la Información, she expressed the need to continue with the debate and thought that got underway Geneva last year and which will be followed up on in Tunisia in 2005: "For the first time, governments are meeting to discuss Internet, and at this summit, they will listen to civil society. New technologies provide opportunities and challenges. They also contribute to development," she concluded.

Viola Krebs recalled the fact that only 19% of the world's population has access to new technologies and Mercè Brugués emphasized that 80% of children in Burkina Faso do not attend school and that 75% of the population of Senegal is illiterate. According to Krebs, "new technologies offer new opportunities to communicate with the world." She used the example of fishermen in Senegal for whom technology has been very useful: "Now they communicate with the markets and work in networks. At first, they said technology was of no use to them." Brugués' experience in Burkina Faso is very different: "We bought computers and showed people how to use them on a very basic level, now those computers are just sitting in a room. They have not learned because their education is null," she reiterated.

The two speakers did agree on the fact that there should not any directives imposed and that, above all, it is important to listen to people's petitions and formulate solutions for the people they want to help: "The North does not have all the answers," emphasized Viola Krebs

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