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Get your message across

Jane Perrone
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A global media art project is offering anyone with a mobile phone or internet access the chance to see their message to the world beamed onto a famous landmark in one of four major cities.

The Helloworld Project is Switzerland's gift to the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which is taking place in Geneva this week.

An interactive installation, it is the brainchild of digital media artist Johannes Gees. It will use lasers to project text messages onto the UN headquarters in New York, a mountainside in Rio de Janeiro, the Air India building in Mumbai's business district, and Geneva's Jet d'Eau, a 140m-tall water fountain.

It aims to highlight two issues at the heart of the WSIS discussions: the digital divide opening up between developing and developed nations, and the right to freedom of expression.

Anyone can send an SMS message to the city of their choice, via either a mobile phone or the Helloworld Project site.

The texts will be viewed by Mr Gees and a team of more than 25 "message jockeys" - editors at Swiss information site Swissinfo - who will pass them on to the projectors at one of the four cities. Within seconds, they will be flashed up in projections up to 70 by 400 metres in size.

The messages will also be beamed to the summit's delegates and webcast on the Helloworld Project's website.



A laser beam projects the words Hello World onto the 140m tall water fountain, the Jet d'Eau, in Geneva. Photograph: Denis Balibouse/Reuters

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They can be written in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Portuguese or Spanish, and are free if sent via the website, or the cost of a regular SMS if sent from a phone.

Any texters with mischief in mind are warned that "commercial, sexist or racist messages, or those containing personal insults, will not be projected".

For anyone stuck for ideas about what to write, the Helloworld Project's FAQ says that it is expecting "mostly statements, some personal, some political ... expect funny messages, sharp comments, questions, love poems, messages with social or political content, but also comments on the WSIS".

WSIS will bring together more than 65 heads of state and government to debate who should govern the internet and how the digital divide, which denies poorer countries the same access to technology and telecommunications as richer ones, can be bridged.

The Helloworld Project is the second in a series of public, interactive installations by Mr Gees. His first, Hello Mr President, invited people to send messages to George Bush at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2001.

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