

**COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT
(CSTD)**

**Twenty-first session
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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on
their efforts in 2017 to implement the outcome of the WSIS**

Submission by

Association for Progressive Communications

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 21st session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.



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Re: Inputs for the CSTD WSIS Progress Report 2018

Please find herewith our inputs towards the elaboration of the annual report of the Secretary-General to the Commission on WSIS outcomes as per the resolution "Flow of Information for the Follow-up of the World Summit on the Information Society".

With over 50 member NGOs in more than 35 countries working for the last 25 years in most of the areas related to the WSIS goals, APC's activities in support of the WSIS action lines and themes are many and diverse. They can be summarized as; a) promoting universal access to ICTs, b) supporting rights-based, inclusive ICT related policies, particularly where they affect women, the poor and other marginalised communities in the developing world; and c) promoting inclusive, transparent, multi-stakeholder and accountable internet governance.

In this respect APC's post-WSIS related activities are focused on: affordable internet access for all; defending human rights in the internet sphere, particularly in support of freedom of expression and protection of privacy and understanding the relationship between internet access and economic, social and cultural rights; securing gender equality and women's rights, particularly in relation to ending violence against women; ICT-use which sustains the environment; use of emerging technologies for social change; building the "information commons"; and improving governance, especially internet governance. To support these goals, APC engages over five interrelated areas: research, advocacy, network building, capacity development and strategic communications and outreach. This approach, combined with our long standing prioritisation of linking 'practice' to policy advocacy, and linking local to regional and global activities through our network of national and programme members and partners, puts APC in a unique position to provide inputs for the

development of the post-WSIS agenda.

Sincerely,

Valeria Betancourt
Communication and Information Policy Programme (CIPP)
Association for Progressive Communications

1. Trends and experiences in implementation at national, regional and international levels around the key issues we work with

Access

Almost half the world still remain unconnected and the majority of those with internet access only have access via unaffordable mobile connections with metered usage fees, although there are an increasing number of 'free' Wifi hotspots being provided in many urban areas in developing countries, subsidised by government authorities, or through partnership arrangements and infrastructure build-outs with access network operators and/or content platforms such as Facebook and Google. In addition an increasing number of developing countries now have pilot projects to demonstrate the potential of innovative connectivity solutions such as using TV Whitespace (TVWS) and software-defined radio technologies.

Human Rights on the Internet

Threats to human rights on the internet continue to increase, yet at the same time there have been positive developments to advance internet rights and to understand the connections between access to the internet and the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights. Courts and legislatures continue to grapple with complex policy matters that impact internet rights.

However, the advancement of international norms and adoption of legislation that recognize human rights online does not necessarily mean that these rights are being effectively promoted and protected. In particular APC views with concern the trend toward criminalisation of technical expertise¹. We have also seen escalating threats against human rights defenders who use the internet in their work, in particular people who identify as LGBTIQ and those working on LGBTIQ issues; new forms of violence against women online; exacerbation of discrimination and inequality and ongoing online censorship. Similarly, internet shutdowns continue to be a major issue for those countries affected, for example in Africa most recently in Togo and Cameroun². In addition there have been major cybersecurity breaches and securitisation of cybersecurity discussions.

Internet Governance

The global IGF remains a unique and vibrant forum, producing valuable intersessional

¹ https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/G1725558_0.pdf

² <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/civil-society-organisations-write-international-bodies-over-internet-shutdown-togo>
<https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/apcs-statement-internet-shutdown-cameroon>

work that is being used in other forums. However, even in the IGF the fragility of the multistakeholder approach is evident as participation from governmental and business actors appears to be tailing off. The absence of a government volunteering to host IGF 2017 is a symptom of this broader condition. National and regional IGF initiatives (NRIs) are growing, but they are also struggling to achieve legitimacy and sustainability as inclusive platforms for debate and collaboration and to translate multistakeholder approaches into actual policy shaping and making on issues that impact how the internet is used, run and developed. Some governments remain sceptical of the multistakeholder approach, adopting it inconsistently, if at all. Some continue to demand the establishment of a multilateral/intergovernmental agency or mechanism to coordinate or oversee internet-related public policy. This is evident from [submissions](#) to the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. Non-governmental forums such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) continue to evolve, but being influential in ICANN requires a degree of effort and consistency which is difficult to sustain.

As result the IGF remains the only global forum where different stakeholders can engage with one another in the same space, building common ground, but also engaging in debate, thereby understanding divergences in approach and interests in a way that contributes to more effective internet-related policy and development.

2. Key achievements you would like to highlight around our strategic priorities

The key achievements include:

1. HRC Privacy resolution privacy³
2. Joint SR statement on violence against women online⁴
3. Yogyakarta principles+10 include new principle on "The Right to the Enjoyment of Human Rights in Relation to Information and Communication Technologies"⁵
4. Two publications relating to restrictions on freedom of expression in Asia. [Let the mob do the job": How proponents of hatred are threatening freedom of expression and religion online in Asia](#), and ["Unshackling Expression: A study on laws criminalising expression online in Asia"](#)
5. The third [EROTICS](#) Global Survey to collect data on and map trends concerning sexual expression online, and the impact of the internet on the rights of LGBTQTIQ people and sexual rights activists.
6. The success of the WSIS Forum 2017 High Level Track⁶ and the Workshop on Community Networks⁷
7. IGF 2017 Workshop on Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity (DC3) and the

³ <https://www.apc.org/en/blog/hrc34-why-it-important-internet-rights>

⁴ <https://freedex.org/2017/03/08/un-experts-urge-states-and-companies-to-address-online-gender-based-abuse-but-warn-against-censorship/>

⁵ <http://yogyakartaprinciples.org/principles-en/yp10/>

⁶ <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/apc-statement-wsis-forum-2017-high-level-policy-session>

⁷ <https://dig.watch/sessions/local-connectivity-solutions-unconnected>

DC3 2017 report⁸.

8. Global Information Society Watch annual and special reports with a focus on National and Regional Internet Governance Forums.⁹

3. Main challenges and obstacles faced

2017 has been a time of political turmoil and a surge of regressive actions concerning internet policy and human rights and social justice more broadly, in many parts of the world. Taking place on the heels of a decision to repeal net neutrality in the United States, and a number of alarming developments over the year ranging from [severe restrictions on access to and use of the internet ahead of the Catalan referendum](#) to the [arrest of two IT consultants in Turkey](#) under anti-terrorism laws while they were participating in a workshop with human rights defenders, the current political climate is likely to colour the nature and dynamics of international deliberations on the development of the internet.

The [crackdown](#) on the use of secure digital communications in many parts of the world is very concerning, posing a threat to freedom of expression, privacy, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and a range of associated rights, especially for persons at risk. A number of governments, including Australia and the United Kingdom, are threatening to legislate backdoors for law enforcement in encryption standards, which would substantially weaken security for everyone while increasing the likelihood of damaging attacks from bad actors.

Attacks on freedom of expression online come from a range of actors, including the state through repressive legislation, non-state actors through harassment and trolling, and sometimes a combination of the two, when organised attacks take place with some level of endorsement or tacit approval from the state, given the level of impunity that follows.

4. Projects, initiatives and actions we should underscore

There continue to be an increasing number of 'connect the next billion' initiatives by large commercial companies, foundations and other agencies, which plan to launch thousands of Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites, blimps, and other high altitude platforms. However these often do not take into account the existing constraints on better access created by barriers in the policy and regulatory environment which restrict the adoption of small scale and innovative solutions to connectivity issues.

In particular, the potential for rural communities to build their own local access infrastructure using wireless and even fibre technology is gaining increasing attention as a key opportunity for meeting universal access goals. As has been observed at the 2017 WSIS Forum, if the policy and regulatory environment is made more conducive, community networks offer a strong potential prospect for the next billion to simply connect themselves. The viability of these initiatives is being reinforced by the availability of low-cost solar power for addressing the energy needs of the network, and this can form the basis for expansion into power

⁸ https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/5133/763

⁹ <https://www.giswatch.org/2017-national-and-regional-internet-governance-forums>

generation for many other purposes in the village.

In addition a number of other initiatives supported by the APC are worth noting:

- The **Local Access** initiative, which aims to identify the factors and dynamics that hinder unconnected communities from connecting themselves,
- The **Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch)** 2017 which focuses on the IGFs at national and regional levels,
- The **African School for Internet Governance (AfrisSIG)** 2017 held in Egypt,
- The **EROTICS** Global Survey 2017 on Sexuality, rights and internet regulations
- The **IMPACT** Project
- **All Women Count:** Take Back the Tech supporting a feminist approaches to ICTs
- **UNESCO indicators project** to develop internet universality indicators

5. Future actions to improve the implementation of the WSIS outcomes

Ensuring better ICT access will ultimately depend on a variety of important policy decisions, but some of these may not be easy to make for governments, and thus require public consultation and input from civil society, the technical community, and others with expertise.

In addition Internet Governance processes/internet policy making needs to be less multilateral and more open, inclusive, transparent, bottom up, and democratic. APC's view is that multi-stakeholder participation in internet governance is not an end in itself, but is a means to achieve the goal of inclusive, democratic, transparent and accountable internet governance that enables effective policy making so that the internet is reinforced as a tool to advance human rights and democratisation. We view global internet policy debates, such as the WSIS review process as an opportunity to strengthen efforts to improve and democratise the governance of the internet, as well as to help restore trust in the internet governance ecosystem.

Civil society's role in all this is particularly important. Aside from providing relevant expertise, often from the 'coalface' of work with local communities, civil society's function in public awareness-raising is critical in putting pressure on the political process that will determine our ability to provide universal affordable broadband and other means for harnessing ICTs to help meet the SDGs.

6. New commitments we would be willing to make to further implement the WSIS outcomes

APC has been consistently committed to the development of the Internet governance forum (IGF) since its creation and sees it as the most important international policy area aimed at improving the governance of the internet. We commit to strengthening, deepening, improving multistakeholder approaches to IG, capacity building around IG, facilitating the participation of different movements and communities (especially from the global south) in IG processes.

We also commit to increasing the awareness of the potential of innovative technology and institutional models for helping the unconnected connect themselves, and to build the capacity of those working to support these initiatives.

Finally, we commit to expand our work on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) on the internet by reinforcing its realisation supported by access and use of the internet by

empowering and increasing capacities in civil society actors to monitor, analyse and advocate towards holding governments accountable for their commitments on social, economic and cultural rights. Similarly, we commit to continue strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations and activists to effectively use human rights mechanisms and instruments to advance human rights online.