IGF 2022 - Resilient Internet for a shared, sustainable, and common future

Paul Mitchell

March 31, 2022

Good day to all of you. Today, I'm pleased to speak with you about the Internet Governance Forum.

The Internet governance forum is planned later this year - in a Hybrid mode online, and in person in Ethiopia- and is likely to have over 10,000 participants - indicative of the increasing reliance we all have on the internet. And, it comes at a time when increasingly the UN system as a whole is leaning into technology issues and recognizing the fully intertwined nature of our shared reliance on the Internet and digital services made possible because of it.

It's my honour to chair the Multistakeholder Advisory Group of the IGF. The MAG is the organization that is responsible for producing the Internet Governance Forum. The Internet Governance Forum was created as an outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005. From a small event with just a couple of hundred people at the first one, the IGF has grown to attract over 10,371 participants from 175 countries last year who participated both online and in person in Poland. This growth reflects the ever-increasing importance of the global Internet to all areas of society.

To hone our focus this year, we have selected the theme, Resilient Internet for a shared sustainable and common future"

The level of interest in digital and internet governance has never been higher and our selected theme reflects a goal of aligning the work of the IGF with other UN work on digital policy issues, including "Our common Agenda" with its call to reinvigorate multilateralism to address 12 specific areas beginning with "leaving no one behind and "Protecting our Planet. And the UN Global Compact focused on sustainability and human rights, with its 10 guiding principles.

Our selected theme highlights that we all share a reliance on digital technologies, and a need for those systems to be resilient. Resilience has been a key attribute of the Internet since its early days. The Internet has shown an amazing capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, including physical harm to network components, and intentional attacks intended to cause harm.

With a resilient, globally interoperable infrastructure amazing things happen.

We have a few sub-themes as well, that reflect operational opportunities and challenges that I would like to highlight.

First, and still most important, we haven't finished connecting everyone. While we have made meaningful progress, it remains critically important that we definitively complete the task of getting everyone connected – leaving no one behind. The World Wide Web Foundation has championed a people-centric approach to "meaningful connectivity" that includes affordable access,   But connectivity is not enough – to deliver meaningful connectivity we need to ensure the connectivity can be meaningfully used – that means not only access, but capacity building and skills training, and improving the data on real usage, versus theoretical, and having real access to the services they need. And we need new commitments to fund the gaps based on real data, as well as new models for finance and appropriate policy to create incentives to address these issues in a sustainable manner.

Next, we need to avoid fragmentation. This has become an increasingly hot topic with many potential types of fragmentation that could arise, including fragmentation of technologies in use, fragmentation of protocols, fragmentation of commercial markets and systems, fragmentation at the policy level. Work needs to be done to understand and address the issues leading to fragmentation.

Our third sub-theme is governing data and protecting privacy. A critically important area with technical, commercial, and human rights implications. This is a recognition that data protection is critically important for the exercise of human rights online, and data protection is a key interest of policy makers globally.

In closing I'll note that these are important issues at an important time in history. The MAG is committed to developing an IGF 2022 program that builds on last year's success and brings us closer to realizing a resilient Internet for a shared, sustainable, and Common Future.

Thank you.