

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

**Twenty-eighth session  
Geneva, 7-11 April 2025**

## **Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years**

### **Submission by**

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the CSTD secretariat that will inform the substantive discussion at the CSTD on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years during its 28<sup>th</sup> annual session in April 2025, in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution E/RES/2023/3, to the CSTD to conduct such substantive discussions and to report thereon, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly.

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# **United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development**

## **Twenty years in the implementation of outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)**

### **WSIS+20 Reporting Template**

Name of organization: OHCHR

Name of respondent: Scott Campbell

Role of respondent: Chief, Technology and Human Rights Section

Date of response: 13 December 2024

#### **I. What is your organisation's formal role and responsibilities concerning WSIS implementation?**

##### **a. Mandates of your organization relevant to the WSIS implementation**

OHCHR has the lead mandate on human rights within the UN system, which is one of the pillars of the UN Charter and supports the implementation of all internationally recognized human rights instruments. The increasing diffusion of information and digital technologies as well as the WSIS action lines intersect with all human rights, civil, political, economic, social, cultural rights as well as the right to development and the right to a healthy environment. OHCHR as well as the UN Human Rights Council and its mechanisms have increasingly focused on the intersection of technology and human rights.

##### **b. Brief History of your organization's contribution to the World Summit on the information Society (WSIS)**

##### **c. Implementation processes and initiatives within your organization and/or in partnership with other organisations**

OHCHR participates through UNGIS, and also after the adoption of the Global Digital Compact, through relevant provisions of the GDC that also contributes to WSIS implementation.

**II. What have been your organization's main contributions to the direct implementation of the WSIS outcomes and related areas of digital development since the Summit, particularly since 2015?**

**a. WSIS Action Lines (as lead, co-facilitator or supporting participant)**

Contributing to WSIS Action Lines, OHCHR in line with its mandate, undertakes a range of activities that contribute to the direct implementation of WSIS outcomes. These activities include those mandated by the Human Rights Council and General Assembly as well as activities and work by OHCHR in its capacity as Secretariat for human rights mechanisms, including Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures. Activities include OHCHR's engagement with States, private sector, civil society, activities in field presences and headquarters, intergovernmental processes and treaty processes, as well as engagement with the rest of the UN system to ensure a human rights approach to the various action lines. Forms of activities include monitoring and reporting, including drafting of HC and SG reports; technical cooperation and capacity building with States; country-specific work on regulation; advice and engagement with States and civil society in relation to HRC and GA resolutions, as well as support to the outputs by human rights mechanisms. A general and non-exhaustive overview of the various works relevant for the WSIS action lines on digital development can be found in the OHCHR report to the Human Rights Council in 2024 ([A/HRC/56/45](#)). Among these are, as relevant for:

Action line 2: OHCHR's work on connectivity and shutdowns (including report to the [A/HRC/50/55](#)); monitoring and public advocacy around shutdowns; integration of issues of connectivity, accessibility, and shutdowns in thematic and country specific reports to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly; OHCHR report on assistive technologies (based on HRC resolution A/HRC/58/1);

Action lines 3 and 9: OHCHR drafting of SG report on countering disinformation (A/77/287); OHCHR review and recommendations to States on regulatory initiatives relating to the digital space or to digital technologies; contribution to Department of Global Communication's development of Global Principles for Information Integrity; OHCHR actively participates in various UN working groups on disinformation, hate speech and information integrity with a view to strengthening the alignment with human rights;

Action line 5: OHCHR has made extensive contributions to the understanding of the challenges to the right to privacy in the digital age, and made comprehensive

recommendations that have influenced policy in many contexts. Key products include a series of reports on the right to privacy in the digital age: A/HRC/27/37; A/HRC/39/29; A/HRC/48/31; A/HRC/51/17, discussing topics such as mass surveillance, data protection standards, artificial intelligence, spyware, encryption, public surveillance.

Action line 6 and 7: OHCHR engages considerably in analysis and recommendations for strengthening the legal and policy framework around digital governance, including through the work done by human rights mechanisms; OHCHR's EU Project on regulation of digital technologies; B-tech work on private sector responsibilities; OHCHR work on exclusion and discrimination in connection with digital transformation and digitalization projects (see OHCHR reports on Privacy in the digital age)

Action line 7: On health, and especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, [access to vaccines, medicines & other health products](#) was a key area of work. As health technologies has grown, OHCHR has addressed and integrated tech and data considerations and analysis systematically into our work. In country, tech and data gap considerations and human rights and non-discrimination analysis is being conducted in assessments on Universal Health Coverage and access to health care services in countries such as Somalia, Cameroon or DRC. Specifically on AI OHCHR with WHO issued a [Policy Brief on Ageism in AI for Health](#) examining the conditions in which AI for health can exacerbate forms of ageism.

Action line 10: OHCHR works extensively on human rights and ethical challenges concerning new and emerging technologies. For example, reports A/HRC/48/31 and A/HRC/44/24 analysed key trends and challenges related to AI and facial recognition, and made numerous recommendations, which were integrated into resolutions of the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.

OHCHR's B-Tech project is a leader in providing extensive guidance on the application of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in the context of digital technologies, including to the development and use of AI.

OHCHR has also made important contributions to promoting human rights-based approaches in the context of technical standard-setting, including by publishing a landmark report to the Human Rights Council on the topic (A/HRC/53/42).

OHCHR also developed the Guidance of the Secretary-General on Human Rights Due Diligence for Digital Technology Use for the UN system.

OHCHR also authored a report analysing the impact of new technologies on key economic, social and cultural rights such as health and social protection (A/HRC/43/29).

Apart from OHCHR, the entire UN human rights ecosystem has developed an impressive body of work concerning the information society that is relevant across all action lines. The following can only be a very brief overview of relevant work and actors; for a comprehensive mapping, see OHCHR report A/HRC/56/45.

The Human Rights Council and the General Assembly have addressed human rights issues relating to digital technologies in many resolutions, consistently affirming since 2012 that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online.<sup>[1]</sup> Panel discussions and other official meetings on digital themes<sup>[2]</sup> have added opportunities to deepen discussions among States and stakeholders.

The special procedure mandate holders have tackled the challenges of the digital age for at least 15 years, constantly expanding the scope of their work to new aspects of digitalization across the spectrum of human rights. Thematic reports have provided nuanced analysis on topics including Internet access and surveillance, online information controls, hate speech, racism embedded in technology, health, worker's protections in the gig economy, education and the alleviation of poverty. Country visits and related reports as well as communications have enabled more targeted engagement with States and stakeholders.

Questions about human rights as they relate to digital technology have been raised many times in the universal periodic review, although with limited scope and depth. Treaty bodies have increasingly taken up topics relating to digital technology, including through general comments and general recommendations, which are particularly helpful in guiding the interpretation of human rights instruments. Concluding observations on key issues are also instrumental in helping States to adjust laws, policies and practices for compliance with human rights obligations.

<sup>[1]</sup> See, for example, Human Rights Council resolution 20/8.

<sup>[2]</sup> See, for example, panel discussion on the right to privacy in the digital age, twenty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council (summary report ([A/HRC/28/39](#))); panel discussion on the

impacts, opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights, forty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council (see [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session44/Documents/CN\\_HRC44\\_newtechupdated.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session44/Documents/CN_HRC44_newtechupdated.docx)); panel discussion on digital, media and information literacy, fifty-third session of the Human Rights Council (summary report ([A/HRC/54/49](#))); annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child on the rights of the child and the digital environment, fifty-second session of the Human Rights Council (see [https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fhrbodies%2Fhrcouncil%2Fsessions-regular%2Fsession52%2Fpanel-discussions%2FCN\\_RoC\\_annual-day\\_23-03-02.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fhrbodies%2Fhrcouncil%2Fsessions-regular%2Fsession52%2Fpanel-discussions%2FCN_RoC_annual-day_23-03-02.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)); panel discussion on cyberbullying against children, fifty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council (see <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fhrbodies%2Fhrcouncil%2Fsessions-regular%2Fsession54%2Fcn-cyberbullying-panel-23-09-22.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>); and intersessional meeting to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and to discuss the role of social media, 4 December 2023 (see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/to-mark-the-75th-anniversary-of-the-convention-genocide>). See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/to-mark-the-75th-anniversary-of-the-convention-genocide>.

Action line 11 and 5: OHCHR participated in the negotiations of the UN Cybercrime Convention with submissions providing analysis of the human rights implications of the conventions and recommendations for mitigating the risks. OHCHR further developed an information note on the human rights implications of the draft convention and will continue to work on guidance to align the implementation of the Convention with the international human rights framework

OHCHR has actively participated in the IGF, with speeches delivered by the United Nations High Commissioners for Human Rights, and members of the Office have actively participated in meetings, sessions and activities. OHCHR discussed topics like internet shutdowns, abuse of the right to privacy, human rights due diligence (HRDD), human rights impact assessments (HRIAs), how to embed human rights into technical standards, and others.

- b. WSIS-related projects
- c. Indicators used to measure the impact of ICT in the achievement of the SDGs in your organization's area of work
- d. What assessment has your organization made of its engagement in WSIS-related work and digital development in its areas of responsibility?

**III. What does your organization see as the main achievements, problems and emerging issues arising from WSIS and from digital development in its areas of responsibility since the Summit, particularly since 2015?**

**a. What have been the main achievements of WSIS and digital development?**

Connectivity and diffusion of information technology has transformed societies and the human rights of millions of people. Information technology has enabled the enjoyment of human rights in some circumstances such as freedom of expression, access to information, right to participation as well as enabling the progressive realization of rights such as education and health. However, there has also been risks associated with such technologies including the right self-determination, non-discrimination and privacy. Inequalities and digital divides also threaten the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications.

**b. What problems, obstacles and constraints have been encountered?**

Despite progress in this area, there remains a need to further strengthen:

- 1) Awareness of the relevance of the international legal framework, including the international human rights framework to digital development;
- 2) application of the international human rights framework to digital development;
- 3) Accurate interpretation of the international human rights framework
- 4) Adequate resourcing of the international human rights system to be able to support Member States to deliver on WSIS outcomes and the achievement of human rights.

**c. What new opportunities and challenges have emerged over the years since WSIS which need to be addressed?**

- With the diffusion of digital technologies which created many opportunities, it has been accompanied by increased corporate consolidation and concentration of power, further exacerbating inequalities.
- Huge advances in data-driven technologies and AI adoption creates many opportunities, with this come privacy issues, and countless challenges across all sectors. The governance of AI
- Threats to privacy have become more comprehensive - business models more intrusive than ever; governments have growing surveillance powers and means of surveillance (AI-based, widely available commercial spyware, etc.) and the benefits of data extraction, processing, analysis, ownership and use are highly unequal. International Data Governance is needed to protect individual rights whilst facilitating increased access to data for the public good.
- Disinformation has emerged an area of concern threatening human rights and the digital economy, while overly broad legal responses to disinformation also poses risks to human rights and stifles digital development.

- Internet shutdowns (including shutdowns, blocks and throttling of communications platforms) have become a very common course of action taken by some governments, almost always failing to comply with fundamental principles of legality, necessity and proportionality and transparency and accountability.
- Growing entanglement of State power and digital tech business (with tech companies providing and running many services, more and more becoming the operating system of government itself) poses novel challenges to advancement of human rights and just, sustainable development.
- GDC is an opportunity to reboot and reenergize work making digital technology work for SDGs and human rights.

**IV. Lessons learned in the implementation of the Summit outcomes in your organisation's specific areas of responsibility**

**V. Observations or recommendations concerning the future of WSIS and digital development, taking into account the outcomes of the Summit of the Future in September 2024**

The Summit of the Future adopted the Pact for the Future and its annexes, including the Global Digital Compact (GDC), both documents reiterating the centrality of human rights and reflecting the commitment of Member States to international law, including international human rights law. The GDC states that digital cooperation is anchored in international human rights law and includes human rights as an objective and cross-cutting principle of the Compact, as well as including specific commitments on human rights. Member States also called on private sector stakeholders to uphold human rights in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Based on the recognition that human rights have become increasingly important in digital development, Member States in the GDC invited OHCHR, along with the 4 WSIS co-facilitators (ITU, UNCTAD, UNDP and UNESCO) to support the its implementation. Human rights and its connection across all of the WSIS action lines is an area where the WSIS+20 review could consider strengthening, so that it is more in line with the recently agreed GDC.

**VI. Please identify publications, reports and other documents by your organisation which you consider can contribute to the work of the review.**

[A/HRC/56/45 Mapping report: human rights and new and emerging digital technologies](#)



[A/HRC/43/29 Question of the realization of economic, social and cultural rights in all countries: the role of new technologies for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights](#)

[A/HRC/48/31 The right to privacy in the digital age](#)

[Human Rights Due Diligence for Digital Technology Use - Guidance of the Secretary-General](#)

[B-Tech foundational paper: Advancing Responsible Development and Deployment of Generative AI](#)

[B-Tech Generative AI project supplement: Taxonomy of Generative AI Human Rights Harms](#)

**Useful reference links:**

Geneva and Tunis outcome documents from WSIS -  
<https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/outcome/booklet/index.html> The  
General Assembly's ten-year review report -  
<https://publicadministration.un.org/wsis10/Portals/5/N1543842.pdf> The  
CSTD ten-year review -  
[https://unctad.org/system/files/officialdocument/dtlstict2015d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/officialdocument/dtlstict2015d3_en.pdf)

Contributions should be submitted by **15 November 2024** to the CSTD Secretariat at [cstd-wsis20@unctad.org](mailto:cstd-wsis20@unctad.org). They will be made available on the CSTD website for consideration by the Commission unless contributors specifically request that their submissions should not be published.

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