



**Seeking a More Free Internet through Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue**  
*Joint Statement of Civil Society Delegates to the 2012 Internet Governance Forum*

We, the undersigned representatives of civil society who attended and participated in the 2012 Internet Governance Forum (IGF) on 6-9 November 2012 in Baku, Azerbaijan, make this statement upon the conclusion of the meeting to highlight the opinions we expressed and concerns we raised throughout the Forum. We engaged in this meeting with the objective of advocating for internet freedoms, including the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, and the rights to seek, receive, and impart information, as protected by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Our participation at the IGF was enabled by the unique multi-stakeholder model of the IGF, which gives civil society an equal voice alongside the government, business, and the technical communities. We believe this model creates more robust dialogue and more meaningful debate on the many issues involved in internet governance, including internet freedom, and we strongly support the continuation of the IGF and reject any proposals that would exclude civil society from its currently active role in determining the future of the internet.

In recent months and years, documents such as [Freedom on the Net](#), published by *Freedom House*, and the 2011 [report on internet freedom](#) published by Frank LaRue, United Nations Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, have documented growing threats to internet freedom around the world. In 2012, UN Human Rights Council [Resolution L13](#) affirmed that all human rights should apply online just as they apply offline, and other internet freedoms were asserted in the 2011 [Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and the Internet](#), signed by representatives of the Organization for American States (OAS), the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

We also note that next month, in Dubai, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) will hold a major meeting that could fundamentally alter the structure and global reach of the internet. At the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT), which is open only to member states, their delegations, and some corporations able to pay for access, governments have put forward proposals that could expand the authority of the ITU over the internet in ways that would threaten internet openness and innovation, increase the costs of access and connection, and erode human rights.

Motivated by these concerns, we make the following recommendations to the Internet Governance Forum and the stakeholders represented in Baku this year:

**To Governments**

- We call upon all governments to work toward universal access to the internet, regardless of barriers related to ethnicity, religion, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation or language.
- We call upon governments not to block websites in any but the most limited and exceptional cases, and only when provided by a just law, pursuant to the purposes laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and implemented according to due process by an independent judicial body in the least restrictive way required to achieve the purported aim. Further, we call upon governments to respect the right of their citizens to appeal in a just court of law the blocking or censorship of websites.
- We implore governments never hold intermediaries liable for content they host or transmit.

- We urge governments not to systematically collect private data on citizens, and to ensure that any surveillance conducted to pursue criminal elements should be limited, exceptional, and subject to the approval of an independent judiciary.
- We call upon all states to investigate and work to prevent physical and online attacks against citizens who express their opinions online, and to hold the responsible parties to account.
- We urge all states to ensure that individuals can speak anonymously on the internet.
- We implore all governments to control the export of technologies that could be used to monitor or surveil, and to restrict the export of those technologies to regimes that have failed to demonstrate a commitment to upholding human rights.
- We strongly urge all governments to cease campaigns designed to deliberately misinform citizens or discredit and dilute independent voices.
- We encourage all governments to include civil society in their delegations to the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) in December, 2012.

#### **To Internet Companies**

- We urge ICT companies to join the Global Network Initiative, and abide by its code of conduct.
- We call upon internet intermediaries not to limit rights to free expression and access to information except after legitimate judicial intervention, and to publicize all government requests to remove content or block services.
- We urge all ICT companies with access to the personal information of users to fully respect the privacy of those individuals, retaining as little of that information as possible and preventing the exposure of that data to third parties.

#### **To International & Multilateral Bodies**

- We call upon international and multi-lateral institutions to adopt internet freedom as a core value, and to speak out publicly against violations of human rights online.

#### **To the International Telecommunications Union & Member States**

- We call upon all those represented at WCIT in December, 2012 to reject any proposals that might expand ITU authority in ways that would threaten the continued growth and global nature of the internet or restrict the exercise of human rights online.

#### ***Signatories:***

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| - Freedom House                                  | - Myanmar ICT for Development Organization |
| - 'Gbenga Sesan, Paradigm Initiative Nigeria     | - i freedom Uganda                         |
| - Thai Netizen Network                           | - Community Empowerment for Progress       |
| - Kamal Sedra, DISC Development                  | Organization - CEPO, South Sudan           |
| - Mahmood Enayat, Small Media                    | - Egyptian Democratic Academy              |
| - Asociacion por los Derechos Civiles, Argentina | - Common Europe Foundation                 |
| - Digital Rights Foundation, Pakistan            | - Dr. Katy Pearce, Assistant Professor of  |
| - Alaksiej Carniajeu, Belarus IT Aid             | Communication, University of Washington    |
| - Siarhei Mackievic, Assembly of Pro-Democratic  |  |
| NGOs of Belarus                                  |  |
| - Anas Helali, Syrian IT specialist              |  |
| - Arzu Geybullayeva, Azerbaijani blogger         |  |