



The United Nations
Secretariat of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)
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Attachments

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Date 12 November 2012
Re Internet Governance Forum 2012

Dear Sirs,

On November 6th, you received a public letter from the Expression Online Initiative expressing concern about a series of alleged incidents at the 7th Internet Governance Forum that took place in Baku, Azerbaijan. The letter refers to problems with registration of participants and media, the installation of a booth, as well as the distribution of reports on the conference grounds.

The Freedom Online Coalition is a group of countries united in their ambition to protect and further freedom of expression on the Internet around the world. The member countries of the Coalition have endorsed a founding statement, including UN principles such as respect for the freedom of expression, assembly and association, as a basis for their cooperation in this regard. The statement also expresses the key importance of engaging all stakeholders and our commitment to work closely together in a multi-stakeholder process to further Internet freedom globally. A copy of the statement is herewith attached.

On behalf of the members of the Freedom Online Coalition, many of whom were represented with a delegation at the Internet Governance Forum, the Netherlands Government would like to urge you to review and respond to the Expression Online Initiative letter to clarify the proceedings at the 7th IGF, so as to assure that they are held in the spirit of the above mentioned principles.

Yours sincerely,

In capacity as chair of the Freedom Online coalition,

Lionel Veer
Human Rights Ambassador
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Freedom Online: Joint Action for Free Expression on the Internet

1 Underscoring our commitment to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and reaffirming that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, as well as the right to freedom of assembly and association, the right to the protection of the law against arbitrary interference with his or her privacy, and the freedom of religion or belief, amongst others,

2 Recalling our commitment to the principle that the human rights that people have offline enjoy the same protection online,

3 Noting that the Internet has always been fueled by policies that promote the free flow of information and that protect human rights and foster innovation, creativity, and economic growth,

4 Noting with concern that in many countries these human rights and fundamental freedoms are increasingly subject to restrictions, whereby the flow of information on the Internet and through connection technologies is limited beyond the few exceptional circumstances in which restrictions are acceptable in accordance with international human rights legal obligations,

5 Noting that governments are increasingly making use of a variety of measures to limit these freedoms in a manner contrary to their obligations, such as illicit monitoring, filtering and hacking, on- and offline repression of network technology users, including intimidation and arrests, and even completely shutting down the Internet and mobile networks,

6 Recognizing the need for States to protect the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the Internet and through connection technologies, and to support individuals, organisations and institutions who use new technologies to promote human rights, democracy and development,

7 Considering the key importance of engagement by all relevant stakeholders, including governments, businesses, civil society, academics and other experts, in protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms online, and underlining our commitment to work closely together in a multi-stakeholder process to further Internet freedom globally,

8 Considering the responsibility of businesses to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms on the Internet and through connection technologies, and the ways in which those technologies, products, and services can be used to impact these rights and freedoms,

We, as participating States, dedicate ourselves to:

- A Establishing a coalition to share, as appropriate, information between our States on potential violations and other measures that undermine the enjoyment of freedom of expression and other human rights on the Internet and through connection technologies around the world, and to consider measures needed to protect and advance these rights, working in close engagement with all relevant stakeholders. The coalition intends to hold a senior-level meeting at least once a year and maintain frequent working-level coordination.
- B Collaborating closely to support – both politically and through project aid – the ability of individuals, particularly those operating in repressive environments, to exercise their human rights through the Internet and connection technologies. Participating States intend to engage with other governments, regional organisations, international institutions, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders to reinforce our efforts in this regard.
- C Cooperating together in appropriate international and regional organizations and through our diplomacy with individual countries to promote the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly with respect to the Internet and connection technologies, and
- D Engaging together as members of this coalition with information and communication technology businesses from across the globe on their responsibility to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms online. Participating states intend to encourage such businesses to adopt practices, as well as policies or statements of principle, that address concerns

related to the export and misappropriation of technologies for repressive ends, inappropriate requests for personal data for political purposes, and illegitimate blocking of content, and to take all other measures necessary to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms on the Internet and through connection technologies.

Endorsed by Austria, Canada, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Estonia, Ghana, Ireland, Kenya, the Republic of Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Sweden.