

Minutes of the Freedom Online Coalition's Strategy and Coordination Meeting

09:00 - 12:30 - Wednesday 5 February 2020 in Accra, Ghana

Attendance: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina [observing], Canada, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America; FOC Support Unit [SU]

- Welcome and opening remarks
 - Mr. Owusu Bediako-Poku, National Cybersecurity Centre of Ghana, welcomed Members to the Meeting, taking place on Day 0 of the 8th Annual Freedom Online Conference in Accra.
- Housekeeping
 - SU provided an overview of the Day 0 agenda, which included the Strategy and Coordination Meeting, Peer Learning Session, FOC and FOC-AN Roundtable, a session on diplomatic coordination in New York and a meeting of the Task Force on Human Rights and Cybersecurity.
- Looking back: Update on FOC Chairmanship 2019-2020
 - Diplomatic Coordination
 - Estonia delivered a statement on behalf of Members of the FOC in the June session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.
 - The language on the statement was based on the FOC's Defending Civic Space statement.
 - Estonia noted that the process was a great example of leveraging local diplomatic networks and of good collaboration and communication amongst Members.
 - New York coordination around OEWG and GGE processes.
 - US noted that there had been progress in activating the NY network: Members had identified points of contact and a mailing list was created to facilitate coordination and information sharing.
 - FOC held two coordination meetings in New York, one in June hosted by the US and another in September, hosted by Germany and Ghana.
 - Two thirds of the Members attended the meetings, where they had robust discussions, embracing the unique diversity of the FOC.
 - Members noted that there is a strong basis in New York to build on and have active engagement in the years ahead.
 - Shaping Global Norms
 - Canada provided an update on the Defending Civic Space statement
 - The development of the statement had been challenging, taking more than a year to finalize. The lessons learned from the process would hopefully help inform the development of future statements.
 - The statement had been developed with valuable input from the Advisory Network.
 - The statement had already been useful in various platforms and Members noted looking forward to using it in future events.
 - Germany provided an update on the Digital Inclusion statement
 - The decision to issue the statement was made in 2018 when Germany was the Chair and they were pleased to have worked with the current Chair Ghana to develop the statement.
 - The statement will be launched at the opening ceremony of the FO Conference.
 - Germany noted that they are looking into possibilities of utilizing the statement in the next session of the HRC in March.
 - Estonia and the Netherlands provided an update on the Cybersecurity statement

- Final draft had been circulated to Members on Tuesday the week before for a silence procedure ending on Thursday 6 February.
 - Members had a discussion on the final wording to agree on the final language of the statement.
 - Provided that the silence procedure will not be broken, the statement would be launched on Day 2 of the FO Conference, 6 February.
 - The Netherlands noted that they will hold a side session on human rights and cybersecurity at HRC later this month and could present the statement there.
 - Finland and the UK provided an update on the Disinformation statement.
 - The leads are compiling the next draft following several comments and input from FOC Members and the Members of the FOC-AN.
 - The aim was to launch the statement in Accra but given the extensive input from Members, the launch will be pushed back to a later time this year.
 - Canada provided an update on the AI statement.
 - Complexities surrounding the other statements are applicable to the work on AI as well.
 - Decision had been made earlier to postpone the development of the statement into the new Program of Action.
 - Canada noted their interest in exploring working methods for the statement and noted particular interest in learning more of the work of the Task Force on Human Rights and Cybersecurity.
 - Ireland thanked colleagues for their leadership in developing the statements and noted that they are thinking of ways to integrate language from the statement on Defending Civic Space into their work at the HRC.
 - Canada noted that it might be useful to make the statements more strategic and narrow in scope.
 - Austria noted they are developing their national AI strategy and are pleased to see work on AI being done in the Coalition.
- Multistakeholder engagement
 - FOC Advisory Network (FOC-AN) has been active in the FOC throughout the year, including providing input into all of the joint statements, and several of its Members participating in the Task Force on Human Rights and Cybersecurity.
 - FOC-AN is in the process of selecting Members to its new cohort, whose term will begin on 1 March 2020.
 - Out of the 30 Members, 25 is renewing their membership for another term, in either organizational or individual capacity.
 - The 8th Annual Conference of the FOC is a key event for the Coalition's multistakeholder engagement, with hundreds of representatives from civil society, private sector and academia attending.
- The year ahead: FOC in 2020
 - As of now, no Member has come forward to be the Chair in 2020 after the Ghanaian Chairmanship concludes at the end of February.
 - As such, the Friends of the Chair will chair the FOC until the end of 2020.
 - Finland provided an update on Chairmanship 2021.
 - Finland will be the Chair from January to December 2021.
 - The discussion on 2021 priorities and Program of Action to start at the Strategy and Coordination Meeting at RightsCon in June.
 - SU provided an update on finance.
- Program of Action 2020
 - The draft PoA 2020 had been circulated to FOC and FOC-AN for review and comments in January.
 - Following written input from Members and discussions from the meeting, the SU will circulate a second draft in the coming weeks, to be finalized on the last FotC call on Wednesday 26 February.
 - Members discussed the priorities for 2020.

- Canada noted that the new PoA should be more narrow and focused, and the FOC should be more strategic on how to leverage the joint statements.
 - Several Members expressed support for Canada's recommendations.
 - US expressed support for the increased emphasis on diplomatic coordination and noted the value of leveraging the expertise of the FOC-AN in the briefings and learning calls as appropriate.
 - Costa Rica, Germany, New Zealand and several other Members noted the importance of the FOC-AN and the multistakeholder engagement.
 - Members noted that the scope of the joint statements may be too broad and also expressed concern about the long and challenging process of developing statements, which risks losing the momentum.
 - Ireland highlighted the importance of the Global South representation.
 - Austria noted the importance of the FOC engaging more with industry representatives and civil society directly, beyond the FOC-AN.
 - Canada noted that the work on AI would be moved into the new PoA and are interested in exploring the Task Force model for the AI statement. Canada is also interested in strengthening the diplomatic coordination at UNESCO in Paris on their work on AI.
 - New Zealand expressed interest to explore how the Christchurch Call and the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) could be included in the PoA.
 - Members discussed the implications of the restructuring of the GIFCT and making the membership of the FOC a criterion for governments to join the advisory committee of the GIFCT.
- Support Unit Mandate
 - Global Partners Digital's role as the mandate-bearer for the FOC Support Unit Mandate was renewed for another year.

Action>> Members to provide any additional input into PoA 2020 by emailing the SU by 20 February.
Action>> SU to circulate a revised PoA draft ahead of February's FotC call.

- Breakout groups
 - Development and dissemination of joint statements.
 - Members agreed on two broad deliverables.
 - Creation of a task force or a working group to identify good practice on statement writing, including repeating issues like wording choices (should/must etc.)
 - Review of statements via a questionnaire to identify how Members had used the statements and identify how to best leverage the statements going forward.
 - Diplomatic coordination.
 - For diplomatic coordination to be effective, it should be focused on specific processes, have specific intended outcomes and relevant forums should be identified.
 - Once these have been identified, it would be useful to hold learning calls on the issues being discussed, which are usually of technical nature and not easily accessible.
 - Diplomatic coordination works best if there is a lead country that can follow up on processes and it is important to identify a contact point in each network to engage with.
 - It would be useful to have a guide that alerts Members of problematic issues/language. The FOC-AN could also be helpful in flagging up issues that the Members may miss, for example language on human rights.
 - Members also agreed that it would be useful to provide mechanisms for smaller countries to input into conversations.

Action>> Members to express interest in joining the task force on identifying best practice for joint statements by emailing the SU by 24 February.

Action>> SU to prepare a survey/questionnaire on the use of joint statements to be circulated to Members by 6 March.

Action>> Members to express interest in leading one of the FOC diplomatic networks by emailing the SU by 28 February.