

Friends of the Chair monthly call #2

Wednesday, 23 February 2022, 14:00 UTC

Attending: Canada (FOC Chair 2022), Denmark, Finland, France, Ghana, Netherlands, Switzerland, UK, US; Support Unit [SU]

Horizon Scanning

- Canada noted that:
 - The FOC [Joint Statement on Spread of Disinformation Online](#) was submitted on behalf of the Coalition to the UN Secretary-General in response to the draft resolution [A/RES/76/227 “Countering Disinformation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”](#).
 - Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mélanie Joly, spoke at the Global Conference for Media Freedom in Estonia on the threat of disinformation, referencing the Coalition’s work on protecting human rights online.
 - The FOC also participated in a panel on the interlinkages between media freedom and Internet freedom.
 - Canada and France hosted an event in Paris on online gender-based violence against women as rights defenders, politicians and journalists.
 - For the purpose of inclusivity and accessibility of FOC documents, Canada has translated five Joint Statements and two foundational texts into French, which will be published on the FOC’s website.
 - In discussions on the “UN Common Agenda” held in New York on February 22, Canada, Australia and New Zealand referred to the FOC as an important hub for the multistakeholder consultations towards the Global Digital Compact.
- Denmark provided an update on the [Copenhagen Pledge on Tech for Democracy](#).
- The Copenhagen Pledge serves as a value framework for the Tech for Democracy initiative, outlining the vision for a digital future based on democratic values and human rights.
 - The Copenhagen Pledge underlines the joint responsibility of all stakeholders to develop and use digital technologies for the benefit of democracy and human rights and encapsulated the multi-stakeholder nature of the initiative.
 - All interested parties from different sectors are called upon to join Tech for Democracy by signing onto the Pledge.
 - Denmark will use FOC as a prioritized platform for the Copenhagen Pledge under the Tech for Democracy initiative, and encouraged FOC Members to join as signatories, noting that it will send the official call to FOC Members in the upcoming weeks.

Action>> SU to circulate the Copenhagen Pledge on Tech for Democracy for Member’s review. *[This has been completed.]*

Program of Action 2022

Shaping Global Norms

- Canada provided an update on diplomatic coordination and the local FOC diplomatic networks.
 - Geneva
 - The Geneva diplomatic network held an Introductory Working-Level Meeting on February 9, and an Ambassador-level meeting on February 16.

- The network discussed priority areas and outlined its program of work and timeline to ensure a strategic approach to local diplomatic coordination and to advance common objectives.
 - Canada noted the network plans to engage in the Human Rights Council (HRC), highlighting the Freedom of Expression Resolution at the 50th (June/July 2022) session of the HRC, but also noted other opportunities for greater horizontal engagement at forums such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).
 - The network will support the FOC's event at the IGF to discuss the protection of human rights against the rise of digital authoritarianism.
 - Paris
 - Canada highlighted two key objectives for the Paris diplomatic network:
 - Raising awareness of the FOC's work among relevant stakeholders within and outside of the network.
 - Facilitating coordination with FOC Members to shape discussions and outcomes in the relevant multilateral processes.
 - New York
 - Canada identified the possibility of FOC engagement in the UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, as well as leveraging the FOC to coordinate positions in response to the resolution [A/RES/76/227 "Countering Disinformation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms"](#) at the UNGA Third Committee.
- Canada provided an update on external FOC engagement:
 - Currently developing plans to launch a Global Speaker Series on the topics of digital inclusion and democracy in the digital age, raising the profile of the FOC and connecting the FOC diplomatic networks.
 - In Geneva, the speaker series will focus on connectivity and bridging the digital divides in April, featuring speakers from the ITU (TBC).
 - In San Francisco, in preparation for the Summit of the Americas, the conversation will focus on advancing online civic participation with the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Pedro Vaca Villarreal in May.
 - In Paris, an event is being planned featuring representatives from industry on digital literacy and disinformation in June (TBD).
 - In November, a conversation with UNESCO is planned focused on the importance of Civic Participation and Diversity of Content Online.
 - In New York, discussions will focus on the Ottawa agenda and how it relates to the UN processes in December.
 - Canada also noted possible engagement in Washington (TBD).

Action>> Members to reach out to Canada if interested in featuring or suggesting panellists for the speaker series.

Promoting Multi-stakeholder Engagement

- SU provided an update on Task Force on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights (TF-AIR):
 - SU noted the Task Force held its first monthly call in February, and is currently discussing potential speakers to invite to the future TF-AIR learning calls.

- UK inquired whether there is alignment between the work of TF-AIR and the G7 working group focusing on AI and human rights.
 - Canada noted that there is an explicit reference to the work of the FOC in the working document that Germany shared with the G7 Members, implying synergies between the two groups.
 - US recommended that the FOC should be more direct in developing linkages for the FOC's work and the work of the G7.
- Ghana provided an update on Task Force on Digital Equality:
 - The Task Force has finalised its work plan which will be discussed at the next meeting.
- The US provided an update on Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS):
 - TFIS held its first meeting in January.
 - Meetings will be held every second month, while a newsletter will be issued in the months without meetings.
 - TFIS is preparing to develop best practices for bilateral engagement between governments on the issue of Internet shutdowns.
 - An External Consultees Group to TFIS is being set up.
- SU provided an update on Silicon Valley Working Group:
 - Austria and Canada are working closely as main content coordinators for upcoming meetings of the Working Group.
- Advisory Network (AN):
 - SU noted that the AN subcommittee tasked with reviewing new member applications selected 7 candidates to join the 2022-24 FOC-AN cohort, to which the FOC-AN had no objections:
 - The Friends of the Chair (FotC) are asked to review the final list of candidates. If the finalised selection is approved, new FOC-AN members will be announced at the beginning of March.
 - Canada noted that in the last FOC-AN monthly call, AN members were encouraged to provide input and propose experts for its workshop on the margins of the 51st session of the Human Rights Council, which will seek to address the application of the international human rights law principle of non-discrimination, and the extent to which it covers the threats posed by digital technologies.

Action>> Members to reach out to the US with proposals for external consultees to support the Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS).

Action>> Friends of the Chair to review the final list of FOC-AN 2022-24 cohort candidates until **EOD Sunday, 6 March.**

Ramping up Advocacy, Communication, and Outreach

- Canada provided an update on the country-specific statement (CSS) process, noting that on 16 February, 18 Coalition Members held a meeting to discuss further steps for resolving the process of revising the policy.
 - Members present on the call agreed that the FOC should be flexible to create greater impact, credibility and visibility by responding to emerging issues of concern.
 - Members also agreed that CSS should be issued on an exceptional basis, as a tool that can be used in parallel with like-minded forums and initiatives.
 - Canada is engaging with states bilaterally to find solutions as soon as possible.
 - France expressed its support of the process, noting that it is currently reviewing its position and the Stockholm TOR.

- France emphasised that the process of issuing CSSs should be clear in terms of exceptionality of issuance, and that multilateral fora would be a good avenue for this.
 - UK expressed its support to finalise the process of adopting the policy.
 - US noted that it would be limiting for the FOC to issue the statements only during HRC sessions.
- Canada provided an update on the FOC global social media campaign, noting that the FOC can use social media as a digital diplomacy strategy to advance the goal of raising the Coalition's profile.
 - Canada will be launching a campaign during RightsCon to be held in June, which will include asking a wider audience on Twitter what digital inclusion means to them.

Action>> Members are invited to provide contact information of relevant colleagues within their communications departments [here](#) by **COB Friday, 11 March**, to improve coordination when promoting FOC events and output documents via external communications channels.

- Canada provided an update on FOC Membership:

AOB

- US expressed concerns over the situation in Ukraine and potential scenario of the Internet being restricted or shut down either partially or completely, restricting human rights defenders, media workers, and activists to have access to the Internet.
- US encouraged Members to discuss what the role of the FOC would be considering this potential scenario.

Action>> Members are encouraged to share information should they have any beneficiaries in Ukraine to help with issues of Internet access and cybersecurity.

Housekeeping

- Outstanding action items from the January Friends of the Chair call
 - Members to express interest in chairing the Coalition in 2023 by contacting the SU or Canada, FOC Chair 2022.
 - Members are invited to express interest to support Canada in leading diplomatic networks in 2022.
 - Members are invited to leverage the FOC Joint Statement on Spread of Disinformation, and submit their own reports to the UN Secretary-General highlighting good practices and shaping language on countering disinformation online. (CA will probably mention this earlier in the call)
 - Members are invited to engage or share views with Canada in finding a way forward regarding the adoption of the country-specific statements process.
- Internal Program of Action 2022
 - The SU has initiated outreach to all FOC members to establish a more regular dialogue and optimise the support it provides.
 - The process was started in the middle of February and will continue into summer.
- FOC Calendar:
 - Task Force on Digital Equality Monthly Call - Thursday, 24 February
 - Silicon Valley Working Group Monthly Call - Tuesday, 1 March
 - T-FAIR monthly call - Thursday, 10 March (TBD)

- FOC-AN Monthly Call - Wednesday, 16 March
- Friends of the Chair call - Wednesday, 30 March
- Task Force on Internet Shutdowns Monthly Call - March (TBD)