

Friends of the Chair monthly call #1
Wednesday, 26 January 2022, 14:00 UTC

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

Welcome

- SU opened the meeting and welcomed the Friends of the Chair 2022 group, including Denmark and France as new members.

Chairship 2022

- Canada noted that the [FOC 10th Anniversary Helsinki Declaration](#), published in December 2021 during the Finnish Chairship, has:
 - Articulated key points around respecting human rights in a digital context.
 - Provided an opportunity for the FOC to continue as a central point in relation to advancing protection of human rights in a digital environment.
- Canada pointed out that the FOC will continue working to shape global norms by strengthening its international and regional engagement within relevant forums, e.g. UN, Council of Europe, OECD and G7.

Chairship mandate

- SU noted that the FOC is seeking Chairship candidates for 2023.

Action >> Members to express interest in chairing the Coalition in 2023 by contacting the SU or Canada, FOC Chair 2022.

Program of Action (PoA) 2022

- The final draft of the PoA 2022 is placed under a silence procedure, ending on January 27. *[This has been completed.]*
- The launch of the PoA 2022 is planned for January 31. *[The PoA 2022 has now been launched, and can be found on the FOC website in [English](#) and [French](#).]*
- Canada noted it has engaged a researcher to develop a glossary of agreed-upon language from UN resolutions related to the mandate of the FOC to support negotiations at UN bodies.
 - Canada will be sharing the findings ahead of the UNGA meeting in September 2022.

Shaping Global Norms

- Diplomatic coordination:
 - Canada emphasised that diplomatic coordination allows Members to coordinate in forums, react to emerging issues, amplify the impact of the FOC's statements and increase the visibility of the FOC.
 - Canada underlined its commitment to ensure that the FOC strategically engages in international forums throughout 2022, by sharing information, coordinating positions and advancing strategies to promote Internet freedom and human rights online.
 - A representative from Canada's G7 Rapid Response Mechanism Unit, provided context and observations on the process around the [draft Resolution XIX, "Countering disinformation and promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms"](#), submitted by Pakistan and adopted by the UN General Assembly on 16 December 16.
 - In regards to the Resolution, Canada noted that:
 - This is the first time a resolution countering disinformation has been submitted to the General Assembly's Third Committee.

- Pakistan did not facilitate a strong collaboration between states on how to improve the language of the first draft; conversations on how to improve the language of the first draft were held mostly bilaterally.
 - The involved democratic states managed to soften the language of the final text to tone down the emphasis on the role and responsibility of states over managing information.
 - Democratic states expressed concerns over the recognized attempt of authoritarian states such as Russia and China to shape discussions and norms around the topic.
 - Canada emphasized that the FOC and G7 might be able to propose an alternative vision on how to approach countering disinformation.
- External engagement:
 - Canada noted that, in pursuit of the shared objectives, the FOC will aim to facilitate collaboration with other like-minded international initiatives, such as the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), and the Partnership on Information and Democracy.

Action>> Members are invited to express interest to support Canada in leading diplomatic networks in 2022.

Action>> Provided there are no objections from members until **COB Friday, February 11**, the [FOC Joint Statement on Spread of Disinformation Online](#) will be shared on behalf of the Coalition with the UN Secretary-General.

Action>> Members are invited to leverage the FOC [Joint Statement on Spread of Disinformation](#), and submit their reports to the UN Secretary-General highlighting good practises and shaping language on countering disinformation online.

Promoting Multi-stakeholder Engagement

- Task Force on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights (TF-AIR):
 - Germany noted that the draft of the TF-AIR agenda for 2022 will be shared with Members. *[This has been completed.]*
 - Germany noted that in 2022 TF-AIR will be focused on:
 - Surveillance and privacy issues
 - Algorithm transparency and impact on freedom of expression and association online.
 - The Task Force will aim to leverage its work by engaging in international fora.

Action>> SU to circulate TF-AIR's agenda for 2022 and a call for expression of interest to join the task force. *[This has been completed. Please note that Members interested in joining TF-AIR can do so by **Monday, 7 February** by emailing the SU.]*

- Task Force on Digital Equality:
 - The Task Force is currently developing a comprehensive working plan with defined activities and objectives in 2022 in coordination with Canada.
- Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS):
 - US noted that the meetings will be held every other month.
 - US noted that the co-Chairs are working on a calendar for 2022, as well as SOPs to approach the different lines of effort, as articulated in the Task Force's concept note.
 - US encouraged the Members to reach out to in case of interest to join TFIS.

Action >> Members are encouraged to join the Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS) by emailing the SU.

- Silicon Valley Working Group:
 - SU noted that Austria's representation in the Bay Area is currently undergoing a leadership change.
 - SU noted that once a new colleague is appointed, the working group will continue its work.

- Advisory Network (AN):
 - Canada joined the AN monthly call in January and noted that it provided an opportunity to set points of collaboration between the FOC and the AN, in accordance with the PoA 2022.
 - SU noted that the AN is currently undergoing an election process to select the new cohort, which will serve from 2022 to 2024.
 - SU noted that 23 of the current AN members have renewed their membership.
 - SU encouraged members to share the open call for new member applications, which can be found [on the FOC website](#).
 - Following the AN's selection of new members, SU will share a list with the Friends for a short silence procedure and review before final confirmation.

Ramping up Advocacy, Communication, and Outreach

- Canada highlighted the main commitments outlined in the PoA in terms of advocacy, communication and outreach, and noted it will be reaching out to members to discuss implementation.
- Canada noted it will be encouraging countries who demonstrate strong commitments to protecting human rights to join the FOC.
- As Kosovo and Taiwan have unofficially expressed interest in joining the FOC, Canada noted that it is currently assessing the likelihood for them to be accepted as Members, before encouraging either state to file applications.
- Canada provided an update on the process of issuing country-specific statements, noting that:
 - One of the commitments of the PoA 2022 is to call attention to country-specific situations, recognizing the value of condemning actions incompatible with international human rights law.
 - The proposed amendments to the Stockholm Terms of Reference have not passed the silence procedure in December, as few Members submitted proposals that country-specific statements should be issued on an exceptional basis, drafted only during UN Human Rights Council sessions, and upon expressed consensus of all Members.
 - Canada expressed concerns that the country-specific statements being issued on an exceptional basis would potentially undermine the FOC's ability to act on crises in a timely manner.

Action>> Members to provide views to Canada on partially recognized states' engagement with the FOC by **COB Wednesday, February 16**.

Action>> Members are invited to engage or share views with Canada in finding a way forward regarding the adoption of the country-specific statements process.

Housekeeping

- SU noted that once the PoA 2022 is confirmed, the Internal Program of Action, which was developed in coordination with the Chair and based on previous input from the Coalition, will be shared with the FOC for sign-off.

Action>> SU to share the Internal Program of Action with the FOC for sign-off. *[Please note this has been completed.]*

- FOC calendar
 - **Internal events:**
 - Task Force on Internet Shutdowns Monthly Call - Monday, 31 January.
 - Task Force on Digital Equality Monthly Call - Thursday, 24 February.
 - T-FAIR monthly Call - Wednesday, 9 February.
 - Silicon Valley Working Group Monthly Call - TBC.
 - FOC-AN monthly call - Wednesday, 16 February.
 - Friends of the Chair monthly call - Wednesday, 23 February.
 - **External events:**
 - Global Conference for Media Freedom, 9-10 February, in Tallinn, Estonia.

AOB

- N/A