



# **CANADIAN CHAIRSHIP OF THE FREEDOM ONLINE COALITION**

**END OF YEAR REPORT**

## Message from the Chair

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Distinguished Members of the Freedom Online Coalition, the FOC Advisory Network, and international partners,

This year, the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) redoubled its efforts to advance Internet freedom and human rights online. Our work was guided by a collective vision of democracy in the digital age, namely digital inclusion: informed and engaged publics that can participate meaningfully in society, both online and offline. Digital inclusion rests on four pillars: reliable and meaningful **connectivity** and access, bridging digital divides worldwide; **digital literacy**, ensuring all users are empowered to navigate a more diverse online ecosystem; **civic participation**, free from oppressive practices such as unduly restrictive censorship and Internet disruptions and shutdowns; and promoting the **safety** for everyone of the online ecosystem.

The FOC advanced digital inclusion by affirming and shaping global norms, promoting multi-stakeholder engagement, and ramping up advocacy, communication and outreach through leveraging its existing infrastructure, including its Diplomatic Networks, Task Forces and Working Groups, the multi-stakeholder Advisory Network, and high-level FOC meetings. Some key highlights included:

- Canada issued a Chair [statement](#) on Russian state-sponsored disinformation in Ukraine. The statement received endorsements from 20 FOC member States, was strongly supported by the FOC's Advisory Network, and garnered international news coverage.
- At RightsCon, the world's leading summit on human rights in the digital age, Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly launched the [#MyDigitalInclusion](#) social media campaign, which has since reached an estimated audience of 13 million in over 50 countries.
- Six Canadian missions hosted multi-stakeholder [regional consultations](#) (Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, North America, and Sub Saharan Africa) to engage directly with stakeholders and gather knowledge about Internet freedom challenges at the regional and sub-regional level.
- The FOC's diplomatic networks, task forces and working group played a critical role in raising awareness of the Coalition's collective positions and capacity building efforts across stakeholder groups.
- The FOC published a consensus-based country-specific [statement](#), to address Internet shutdowns in Iran.

We are so grateful for the phenomenal guidance we received from the FOC Support Unit. Lea, Zora, Nusa, Nick, and Nikole – thank you for your fantastic organization, good humour, and excellent judgement throughout the year.

Canada is delighted to pass the torch to the United States as the incoming Chair of the FOC to continue the good work of promoting human rights and freedoms online. We look forward to supporting your efforts to drive concrete policy changes and outcomes that ensure that technologies are used to advance, rather than undermine, human rights, inclusion, and democratic values.

Sincerely,

Philippe-André Rodriguez and Jenna Carter

Canada 



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1. At the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council, coordinated ahead of relevant negotiations and collaborated with FOC members in order to promote human rights in online and digital contexts.
2. At the UN Open Ended Working group (OEWG), coordinated ahead of negotiations and collaborated to promote and support human rights and the multi-stakeholder approach in discussions on responsible state behaviour in cyber space and the application of international law in this context.
3. At the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), reinforced the protection of human rights as central in all discussions of the governance of digital technology and the Internet.
4. At the Organization of American States (OAS), supported the Americas Dialogue on Freedom of Expression Online.
5. Promoted existing frameworks, such as the UN guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD AI principles and UNESCO's recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to counter repressive and authoritarian deployment of AI systems, through inter-alia collaboration with the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders.
6. Facilitated collaboration with other likeminded international initiatives, where appropriate, such as the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), the Partnership on Information and Democracy, and International IDEA in pursuit of shared objectives.
7. Developed a glossary of agreed-upon language from UN resolutions related to the mandate of the FOC to support negotiations at UN bodies.

## Promoting Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

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8. Launched a multi-stakeholder process to develop a new set of "Recommendations for Freedom Online", updating the original "Tallinn Agenda" with a new "Ottawa Agenda".
9. Supported the work of the multi-stakeholder Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS) to address the growing trend of network disruptions, which undermine an open and pluralistic civic space online.
10. Supported the work of the multi-stakeholder Task Force on Digital Equality (TFDE), including the implementation of the Joint Statement on Digital Inclusion.
11. Supported the work of the multi-stakeholder Task Force on AI and Human Rights, including the implementation of the Joint Statement on AI and Human Rights.
12. Supported the work of the Silicon Valley Working Group.
13. Provided a platform for FOC governments, in consultation with the FOC Advisory Network, to elaborate a set of principles illustrating responsible government use of surveillance technology in line with democratic values and respect for human rights.
14. Worked with multi-stakeholder partners, where appropriate, to promote evidenced-based policymaking to address online gender-based violence through research and advocacy efforts.
15. Worked with multi-stakeholder partners to develop a shared understanding of the way in which the principles of non-discrimination applies in digital contexts.
16. Leveraged the expertise of the Advisory Network to advise FOC members on best practices in developing national legislation to advance human rights online and overcome digital divides to ensure ubiquitous, affordable, equitable, and high-quality connectivity through workshops and learning calls.

## Ramping up Advocacy, Communication and Outreach

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17. Called attention to egregious situations worldwide that undermine human rights and fundamental freedoms online and threaten the fabric of democratic societies.
18. Launched a social media campaign to highlight the importance of digital inclusion and the FOC's work to promote it.
19. Committed to making FOC Joint Statements and other foundational documents more accessible by translating them into more languages, such as French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and German.
20. Collaborated with the FOC Advisory Network to create a toolkit for FOC members to use internally; for bilateral engagement; and in diplomatic networks.
21. Supported coordinating FOC members' existing funding resources on technology-related capacity building programs, identifying shared priorities and key target regions in the FOC's biannual Strategy and Coordination meetings, while sharing best practices.
22. Invited non-FOC members to participate in FOC events, workshops, seminars, and side events, where appropriate.



## Program of Action 2022 - FOC Commitments

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The Program of Action (PoA) 2022, developed by Canada, in consultation with the FOC and FOC Advisory Network members, guided the work of the Coalition this year. Through the activities outlined below, the FOC was able to successfully advance the priorities and commitments that it set out to do at the start of 2022.

### Affirming and Shaping Global Norms

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The FOC worked to affirm and shape global norms by strengthening and expanding diplomatic networks, coordinated by local FOC representatives, to share information, coordinate positions and advance strategies to promote Internet freedom and human rights online in priority forums.

#### 1. At the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council, coordinated ahead of relevant negotiations and collaborated with FOC members in order to promote human rights in online and digital contexts.

**March:** The Geneva diplomatic network hosted a virtual learning session on disinformation in the context of Ukraine's resolution on the role of states in countering the negative impact of disinformation on human rights ([A/HRC/RES/49/21](#)). The briefing helped garner additional support from FOC Member states for the resolution.

**July:** At HRC 50, Canada and the Netherlands drafted and led on the biennial Freedom of Expression resolution ([A/HRC/RES/50/15](#)), which had a particular focus on digital literacy. The resolution enjoyed the support of 71 co-sponsors and was adopted without a vote.

**October:** The Geneva diplomatic network hosted a lunch with the UN Tech Envoy, reinforcing that digital human rights issues are increasingly important to the work of the HRC. The meeting also provided an opportunity for FOC member states to discuss the intersection between the Coalition's mission to promote human rights, Internet freedom and digital inclusion, and the UN Tech Envoy and the OHCHR mandates, as well as identifying opportunities for further collaboration.

**October:** On behalf of the FOC, Norway introduced the FOC's [joint statement](#) on Internet shutdowns in Iran, during an interactive dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

#### 2. At the UN Open Ended Working group (OEWG), coordinated ahead of negotiations and collaborated to promote and support human rights and the multi-stakeholder approach in discussions on responsible state behaviour in cyber space and the application of international law in this context.

**July:** Canada and the Netherlands co-hosted a side event on the margins of the OEWG on security of information and communications technologies (OEWG 2021-2025). The event highlighted opportunities for more meaningful engagement on advancing human rights, multi-stakeholderism, and gender at the OEWG through collaboration with the FOC.

#### 3. At the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), reinforced the protection of human rights as central in all discussions of the governance of digital technology and the Internet.

**November:** The FOC hosted a panel, providing a platform to explore the intended and unintended causes and potential impacts of Internet fragmentation, highlighting threats such as restrictions on international data flows, interference with free expression, privacy, and/or encryption; and Internet shutdowns.

**November:** Led by Germany, the FOC's Task Force on Artificial Intelligence hosted a panel on the impacts of algorithms on human rights and the need for transparency and regulation.

#### 4. At the Organization of American States (OAS), supported the Americas Dialogue on Freedom of Expression Online.

**April:** FOC Support Unit Head Lea Kaspar spoke about the FOC's work on advancing digital inclusion at the Special Session on Inclusion and Democracy, organized by the OAS Committee of Juridical and Political Affairs (CAJP). Panellists spoke about building a greater consensus of support for inclusion and respect for diversity as the enabling conditions for open democratic societies that respect human rights.



**October:** As Chair of the FOC, Canada introduced language related to human rights online to a [resolution](#) at the 52nd Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly, with the aim of promoting digital inclusion in the Americas. The resolution emphasized the importance of reducing the digital divide, including the gender digital divide.

**5. Promoted existing frameworks, such as the UN guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD AI principles and UNESCO's recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to counter repressive and authoritarian deployment of AI systems, through inter-alia collaboration with the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders.**

**March:** Canada, in its role as FOC Chair, participated at an OHCHR virtual consultation on the practical application of the [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) to the activities of technology companies.

**March:** Canada shared a submission to the OHCHR on the practical application of the UNGPs in the global tech sector. The statement referenced the FOC's joint statements on [artificial intelligence](#), [restrictive data localization laws](#) and on [disinformation](#).

**July:** The Paris Diplomatic Network and UNESCO hosted a session with Tawfik Jelassi, UNESCO Assistant-Director General for Communication and Information, on the judiciary's role in protecting freedom of expression from digital challenges, and its impact on democracy. Full recording of the event can be found [here](#).

**6. Facilitated collaboration with other likeminded international initiatives, where appropriate, such as the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), the Partnership on Information and Democracy, and International IDEA in pursuit of shared objectives.**

**February:** Canada's Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly spoke at the Media Freedom Conference in Estonia on the threat of disinformation. Head of the FOC Support Unit Lea Kaspar spoke about the need for laws and regulations surrounding the use of digital technologies to be rooted in the protection of human rights.

**March:** The FOC and MFC co-hosted a hybrid event on digital authoritarianism and technology-facilitated threats to journalists and human rights defenders at UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day Global Conference in Uruguay. Full recording of the event can be found [here](#).

**March:** The G7 Media Ministers' Communique included a reference to advance existing initiatives to promote media freedom and plurality of media such as the MFC and FOC.

**September:** Canada and the Netherlands co-hosted a UN General Assembly High-Level Week side [event](#) on disinformation that brought together experts from civil society, industry and the FOC, International IDEA, and the MFC. The panellists called for a democratic, multilateral and multi-stakeholder approach to addressing disinformation.

**December:** The MFC cited the FOC's [joint statement](#) on Iran in their own [joint statement](#) on the situation, condemning actions to restrict access to the Internet.

**December:** Canada's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, David Morrison spoke at the Atlantic Council's annual 360/StratCom Forum on the importance of the FOC to democracy, human rights, and the rules-based international system.

**7. Developed a glossary of agreed-upon language from UN resolutions related to the mandate of the FOC to support negotiations at UN bodies**

*Note: This activity was prorogued, with the activities below prioritised to develop a glossary of agreed-upon language from FOC outputs and underpinning documents.*

**Year-round:** The FOC's language mapping tool was frequently updated with existing FOC language, including all Joint Statements and the Helsinki Declaration, to aid FOC members in diplomatic coordination and advocacy efforts.

**December:** Canada developed a glossary of agreed-upon language from FOC consensus documents to support negotiations at UN bodies.



*Note: Due to competing priorities, the activity at the Council of Europe's Committee on Artificial Intelligence was prorogued.*



## Promoting Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

The FOC identified opportunities for greater multi-stakeholder engagement to promote expertise, diversity, inclusion, transparency and accountability.

### 8. Launched a multi-stakeholder process to develop a new set of “Recommendations for Freedom Online”, updating the original “Tallinn Agenda” with a new “Ottawa Agenda”.

**Year-round:** Canada committed to launching a multi-stakeholder process to develop a set of recommendations for freedom online, building on the decade old [Tallinn Agenda](#) with a new “Ottawa Agenda”. The Ottawa Agenda reflects the evolution of the Coalition’s vision and scope of work since the inception of the FOC in 2011, particularly with regards to new and emerging digital challenges and opportunities. Canada hosted domestic and regional consultations (Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, North America, and Sub Saharan Africa), bringing together experts from civil society, industry and academia to feed into the final set of recommendations. The Ottawa Agenda is set to be launched in January 2023.

### 9. Supported the work of the multi-stakeholder Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS) to address the growing trend of network disruptions, which undermine an open and pluralistic civic space online.

**Year-round:** In addition to coordinating interactive bimonthly calls to foster inclusive, multi stakeholder dialogue and the sharing of ideas, needs, and best practices on Internet shutdowns, TFIS’ top accomplishments include:

- Developed guidance for use in diplomatic engagement with governments that have ongoing Internet shutdowns or a pattern of imposing them, including suggestions for [existing resources](#) and multilateral statements to draw from;
- Coordinated engagement and response by TFIS members to condemn or otherwise counter country-specific Internet shutdowns, as appropriate;
- Shared information on Internet shutdowns rapidly as they occur, and facilitate additional information-sharing between stakeholders.

### 10. Supported the work of the multi-stakeholder Task Force on Digital Equality (TFDE), including the implementation of the Joint Statement on Digital Inclusion.

**Year-round:** TFDE hosted events on digital inclusion and contributed to the development of a toolkit that summarizes previously-agreed upon FOC language on digital inclusion.

- **April:** TFDE hosted a learning call with litigator Nani Jansen Reventlow on how digital technologies have the potential amplify existing forms of oppression. Governments and industry were called to push for compliance with existing instruments protecting human rights.
- **October:** TFDE hosted a panel session on the issue of gendered disinformation, and provided concrete next steps building upon the FOC’s Joint Statements on [disinformation](#) and [digital inclusion](#).
- **October:** Along with Global Partners Digital (GPD), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, TFDE co-hosted a workshop aimed at raising awareness of the value of global South stakeholders in advancing freedoms online and identifying concrete opportunities for engagement in FOC processes.

### 11. Supported the work of the multi-stakeholder Task Force on AI and Human Rights, including the implementation of the Joint Statement on AI and Human Rights.

**Year-round:** The Task Force hosted learning calls with experts from Google, Microsoft, the International Centre for Non-Profit Law (ICNL), and UNESCO on topics including the design, monitoring and adjustment of algorithms.

**November:** T-FAIR hosted a session at the 2022 Internet Governance Forum, in collaboration with ICNL, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Representative on Freedom of the Media, and Ghana, on addressing transparency and human rights matters, with regards to algorithms.





## 12. Supported the work of the Silicon Valley Working Group.

**Year-round:** The Silicon Valley Working Group provided a forum for FOC governments to engage private sector interlocutors in a closed-door setting, providing a venue for frank exchanges and an opportunity to strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration on the protection of Internet freedom and human rights online. This year, the Working Group focused broadly on the theme of trust and safety.

- Representatives of Silicon Valley based tech platforms (e.g., TikTok, Cloudflare and Discord), as well as NGOs, were invited to speak at the meetings. Presenters discussed organizations' responses to current events; policies and tools to protect youth online; and approaches to content moderation.
- Regular meetings have served to strengthen ties between FOC member states and companies in the global tech industry, increasing awareness of the FOC and its priorities and strengthening the community of tech diplomats by providing a forum for discussion of current tech policy issues.



## 13. Provided a platform for FOC governments, in consultation with the FOC Advisory Network, to elaborate a set of principles illustrating responsible government use of surveillance technology in line with democratic values and respect for human rights.

**October:** In collaboration with the FOC, the US led efforts to draft a set of principles illustrating responsible government use of surveillance technology in line with democratic values and respect for human rights. In line with commitments made at the US Summit for Democracy, the principles reflect respect for human rights, non-discrimination, due process, and accountability.

## 14. Worked with multi-stakeholder partners, where appropriate, to promote evidenced-based policymaking to address online gender-based violence through research and advocacy efforts.

**February:** Canada and France hosted an event highlighting the disproportionate impact of digital violence on women. The conversation emphasized the essential role that women — politicians, researchers, journalists, entrepreneurs, activists — play in making the Internet a safer place where human rights are respected.

## 15. Worked with multi-stakeholder partners to develop a shared understanding of the way in which the principles of non-discrimination applies in digital contexts.

**October:** The FOC launched an [online survey](#) sent to experts in the field on how the principle of non-discrimination under international human rights law apply to digital technologies, specifically artificial intelligence (AI). Respondents highlighted to what extent existing international human rights law and standards on non-discrimination are able to effectively address the risks of discrimination posed by AI.

**October:** Canada co-hosted a side event at HRC51 with Global Partners Digital, bringing together legal and policy experts, academics, civil society organizations, the private sector, and government representatives to discuss how the obligation of non-discrimination — especially on the grounds of gender and race — applies to the risks posed by digital technologies.

## 16. Leveraged the expertise of the Advisory Network to advise FOC members on best practices in developing national legislation to advance human rights online and overcome digital divides to ensure ubiquitous, affordable, equitable, and high-quality connectivity through workshops and learning calls.

**May:** The FOC Advisory Network drafted an action-oriented paper to support an inter-American ministerial meeting, identifying concrete solutions, including tools, that support collective action on democracy in the digital age.



## Ramping up Advocacy, Communication and Outreach

The FOC ramped up advocacy, communication and outreach to highlight abuses and worrying trends, to enhance the Coalition's visibility and presence, and to grow existing networks and welcome new members.

### 17. Called attention to egregious situations worldwide that undermine human rights and fundamental freedoms online and threaten the fabric of democratic societies.

**March:** Canada issued a [Chair statement](#) on Russian state-sponsored disinformation in Ukraine. The statement received endorsements from 20 FOC member States and garnered international news coverage. Industry partners highlighted that the statement helped shape their own responses to the rise in disinformation, benefiting from the consensus position of numerous democracies, in the face of divergent requests from individual governments.

**April:** The FOC unlocked the possibility to issue country-specific statements, amending the FOC [Terms of Reference](#).

**October:** Having unlocked the possibility to issue country-specific statements, the FOC issued a [joint statement](#) to condemn Iranian measures to restrict access to the Internet following the nationwide protests over the tragic killing of Mahsa Amini. The FOC emphatically called on the Government of Iran to immediately lift restrictions intended to disrupt or prevent their citizens from accessing and disseminating information online, and from communication safely and securely.

### 18. Launched a social media campaign to highlight the importance of digital inclusion and the FOC's work to promote it.

**June:** At RightsCon, the world's leading summit on human rights in the digital age, Canadian Foreign Minister Joly launched the [#MyDigitalInclusion](#) social media campaign. The campaign has since reached an estimated audience of 13 million in over 50 countries, helping advance digital inclusion as a starting point for democracy in the digital age.

### 19. Committed to making FOC Joint Statements and other foundational documents more accessible by translating them into more languages, such as French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and German.

**Year-round:** To make the FOC a more inclusive and accessible group, Canada translated select [joint statements](#) and [foundational documents](#) into French, Russian, Arabic, and Spanish. Germany supported the efforts by translating documents into German.

### 20. Collaborated with the FOC Advisory Network to create a toolkit for FOC members to use internally; for bilateral engagement; and in diplomatic networks.

**Year-round:** In collaboration with the Advisory Network, Canada developed a toolkit that summarized previously-agreed upon FOC language that will enable Coalition members to quickly pull off-the-shelf language. The five toolkits transform statements on [artificial intelligence](#), [disinformation](#), [defending civic space online](#), [Internet censorship](#), and [digital inclusion](#) into succinct and accessible briefing notes, with talking points, background materials, and key resources.

### 21. Supported coordinating FOC members' existing funding resources on technology-related capacity building programs, identifying shared priorities and key target regions in the FOC's biannual Strategy and Coordination meetings, while sharing best practices.

**Year-round:** One shared programming priority led by the US has been combatting censorship of the Internet. US President Biden announced the Multilateral Surge and Sustain Fund for Anti-Censorship Technology at the first Summit for Democracy, which will enable more users in repressive environments to enjoy unrestricted access to the uncensored Internet, and to sustain those connections in times of greatest need. The US invited likeminded FOC partners to contribute jointly to that effort.





## 22. Invited non-FOC members to participate in FOC events, workshops, seminars, and side events, where appropriate.

**Year-round:** Through the FOC, Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) launched a pilot project to strengthen the participation of underrepresented voices in global discussions about democracy and digital technologies. Through increased engagement of global South stakeholders in relevant FOC Task Forces and diplomatic networks, the project aims to mainstream the inclusion agenda in international discussions.

**October:** During the FOC's first Expo, Italy convened local and international stakeholders to share recent developments, coordinate upcoming activities and discuss strategies to advance human rights, both online and offline.

**November:** To further this commitment, FOC members approved amendments to the Observer Status language in the [Stockholm Terms of Reference](#), to allow "States or non-State entities" to engage within the FOC.

**December:** The FOC welcomed Chile as its 35th member. By joining the FOC, Chile pledged to uphold and advance the Coalition's shared goals and values, working collaboratively to protect and advance human rights, both online and offline.



*FOC members, Advisory Network representatives, and the Support Unit at the FOC Expo, hosted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Rome.*

