

The Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) is an intergovernmental coalition that was established at the inaugural Freedom Online Conference in The Hague, the Netherlands, December 2011. As outlined in its underpinning documents, the FOC is committed to supporting Internet freedom and protecting human rights – free expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and privacy rights online – worldwide. FOC Members work together to ensure the promotion of a rules-based, democratic, and inclusive world, where the use of the Internet and digital technologies reinforces human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Since 2011, the Coalition has grown from 15 initial Members to 37¹, spanning from Africa to Asia, Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East.

Member states of the Coalition gather informally and in consultation with other stakeholders at numerous conferences and intergovernmental meetings relevant to Internet freedom and digital technologies to coordinate viewpoints, share relevant information, and discuss strategies to advance an open Internet in each context. This includes facilitating coordination between local representatives engaging in multilateral fora, such as the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and others, by convening meetings and organising joint efforts within the FOC's Paris, Geneva, New York and Vienna based diplomatic networks.

The FOC outlines joint positions on thematic topics through the issuing of consensus-based statements, such as the Joint Statement on Freedom of Expression Online (2021), the Joint Statement on Spread of Disinformation Online (2020), and the Joint Statement on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights (2020). These statements feed into ongoing diplomatic engagement and public advocacy efforts in multilateral spaces, emphasising the FOC's unified front in relation to priority policy areas, as well as helping individual FOC members frame their own domestic positions, inform diplomatic interventions, and foster improved inter-ministerial coordination. To draw attention to egregious violations of human rights in specific regions, the FOC also issues country-specific statements, such as the Joint Statement on Internet Shutdowns in Iran (2022), which was also presented during an interactive dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The FOC Advisory Network (FOC-AN) was established in 2018 to enhance the Coalition's multi-stakeholder engagement, including through providing advice on aims, objectives and activities of the Coalition, as well as to support its mission of promoting and protecting human rights online. Since its establishment, FOC-AN Members have contributed widely to the FOC's activities and events, and regularly engage with the FOC through in-person roundtable meetings and quarterly Strategy and Coordination meetings.

The FOC's ad hoc Task Forces and Working Groups provide a multi-stakeholder platform for focused and issue-based engagement, facilitating substantive FOC contributions on priority issues, and providing a forum for regular communication with a diverse group of stakeholders. In 2023, these include the Task Force on Internet Shutdowns, the Task Force on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, the Task Force on Digital Equality, and the Silicon Valley Working Group.

In addition to these activities, the FOC periodically hosts the Freedom Online Conference, which offers a multi-stakeholder platform to deepen discussions related to the opportunities and challenges of the Internet and digital technologies, including their effect on the promotion of social, cultural, and economic development. The Conference offers an open platform for discussion among all stakeholders – governments, civil society, the private sector, and others – to share relevant information, develop joint strategies and combine efforts towards their mutual goal of a human rights-based Internet.

At a time when policy issues related to the Internet and digital technologies have become one of the most intensely discussed issues on the international agenda, the Coalition has a vital role to play in promoting the values of democracy and human rights. The FOC remains steadfast in addressing these challenges to the protection and promotion of human rights online, in partnership with the FOC-AN and external stakeholders.

¹ Currently, the FOC consists of: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Republic of Maldives, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Spain, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the United States.