

# Steering Committee Monthly Meeting #10

Wednesday, 29 November, 2023 | 14:00 - 15:00 UTC

Attended: US (2023 Chair); Canada, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, and UK; Support Unit (SU)

## Housekeeping Updates

- The Support Unit (SU) provided an overview of upcoming deadlines and events, including
  - Deadlines:
    - COB Wednesday, 6 December: Silence procedure to confirm Estonia as 2025 Chair ends, should there be no objections or further bids received.
    - COB Friday, 8 December: Deadline to express interest to serve on the Steering Committee (SC) in 2024.
      - Thus far, six expressions of interest have been received: Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Switzerland, the UK, and the US.
      - Due to the growth in Membership this year, there are now 13 seats on the SC. If all current SC Members reapply, there would still be three vacant seats.
      - During the Geneva Strategy and Coordination Meeting (SCM) the US encouraged Members to engage bilaterally with global South countries and encourage their applications to serve on the SC.
  - Events:
    - **Task Force on AI and Human Rights (TFAIR) Workshop | 18 - 19 December | Berlin, Germany**
      - TFAIR is organising a two-day workshop that will build upon ongoing conversations in the FOC around strengthening the multistakeholder approach to digital cooperation and Internet governance, specifically focusing on the Global Digital Compact (GDC), artificial intelligence, and human rights.
      - Participants from governments, civil society, the private sector, and academia, as well as international and regional organisations alongside FOC Member States and members of the FOC Advisory Network (FOC-AN) have been invited.
      - Attendees are kindly asked to confirm their in-person attendance to the TFAIR co-Chairs and Support Unit by Monday, 4 December.

## Discussion Items

### **Sub-Entities Mandate Extensions for 2024**

- The SU noted the objective of the discussion is to arrive at a general agreement on which sub-entity should be put forth for an expedited silence procedure (5 business days) with the SC to confirm the extension of their mandates in 2024, as per the [FOC Terms of Reference](#) (ToR).
  - Following the silence procedure, the confirmed sub-entities will be opened to the full Coalition to join and/or express interest in co-leading. This is intended to further enable diversification of the sub-entity leads, welcoming more than one government Chair.
    - The SU clarified that in addition to the invitation to the wider FOC, the current sub-entity leads who have expressed interest in chairing can continue as leads, pending approval of their mandate extension.
    - The UK noted they are supportive of working together with global South Members as government co-leads and suggested conducting targeted outreach to governments to invite them to co-Chair.

- The SU noted the submission status of the current sub-entities and raised the mandate extension of each to the SC to decide whether to put it forward for silence procedure.
  - Sub-entities who submitted a mandate extension request and government lead expressions of interest:
    - The Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS)
      - The US seconded putting forward TFIS for mandate renewal.
    - The Task Force on Trustworthy Information Online (TFTIO)
      - Canada seconded putting forward TFTIO for mandate renewal.
    - The Task Force on AI and Human Rights (TFAIR)
      - The Netherlands seconded putting forward TFAIR for mandate renewal.
  - Sub-entities who submitted a mandate extension request without a government lead expression of interest:
    - The Task Force on Digital Equality (TFDE)
      - The Netherlands noted they are supportive of the Task Force's thematic focus and inquired whether it is possible to continue TFDE's work through the FOC-AN.
      - The US noted that Ghana, current government lead of TFDE, has previously expressed interest in continuing forward with the Task Force, however flagging that due to limited capacity they would need another government to co-lead.
        - Canada agreed with the approach to invite government co-leads, and underlined that leading a sub-entity is a significant undertaking, especially for smaller governments.
        - The Netherlands advised taking into account Ghana's interest in continuing to move the Task Force forward in 2024, underscoring that TFDE is the only global South led sub-entity and highlighting previous FOC discussions about increasing engagement of global South Members and leveraging their perspectives in the Coalition.
      - The US noted a distinction between internal and external-facing efforts around digital inclusion, flagging that the current TFDE activities have taken an internal-facing approach and querying whether the Task Force's mandate should be approved if it continues with an internal focus.
        - The US and UK agreed that the value of TFDE as an FOC sub-entity would be better leveraged through external-facing work.
      - The Netherlands highlighted that there are a number of areas of overlap in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) Forum and GDC in regard to issues of digital equality, and noted the importance of integrating TFDE's work into the FOC's engagement in these processes.
    - Sub-entities who did not submit a mandate extension request nor government lead expression of interest:
      - Silicon Valley Working Group (SVWG)
        - SC Members agreed not to put SVWG forward for a mandate renewal.
- The SU noted the following next steps:
  - TFIS, TFTIO, and TFAIR will be put forward for an expedited SC silence procedure.

- If there is an objection to any of the three selected sub-entity mandates during the silence procedure, then the mandate of the objected sub-entity will not be extended.
  - The TFDE mandate extension will not be put through for silence procedure, however the SC agreed that the issue of digital equality/inclusion is a priority for the Coalition and will revisit how the work of the Task Force can be continued.
- The Netherlands inquired whether there would be an opportunity to discuss the substance of the sub-entity mandate extensions.
  - The US seconded the inquiry, noting that the SC should have a discussion about the substance of the mandate extension requests [*Please note that the email initiating silence on the 3 sub-entities also includes an ask for SC Members to reflect on the mandates themselves should they have suggestions for leads to consider, and do not wish to break silence.*]

**Decision>>** SC Members agreed to put forward the Task Force on Internet Shutdowns, the Task Force on Trustworthy Information Online, and the Task Force on AI and Human Rights for an expedited silence procedure with the SC to approve their mandate extensions. Silence procedure will conclude **COB Thursday, 7 December**.

**Action>>** SC Members to consider mandates of the sub-entities put forward for silence procedure (TFIS, TFTIO, and TFAIR) and submit any additional thoughts or comments that they want the leads to consider, short of breaking silence, to the Support Unit by **COB Thursday, 7 December**.

### FOC Global Digital Compact (GDC) Paper

- The SU noted this is a continuation of the SC discussions that took place in Tallinn, Estonia and the SCM in Geneva, Switzerland.
  - Ahead of the Geneva SCM, a zero draft of key messages was shared with the FOC and FOC-AN, which was the basis for discussions on the GDC.
  - During the SCM, the US and SU also introduced more in-depth talking points on GDC policy topics that are envisioned to be a core part of the GDC Paper.
  - During these conversations, Members agreed to capture a compilation of specific talking points for governments to use, pending agreement on the policy topic categories, in GDC negotiations based on existing UN and FOC language.
  - Based on the Geneva SCM discussions, the following policy area categories were identified, which are anticipated to require FOC coordination on a like-minded policy position ahead of the Pact for the Future and WSIS + 20 negotiations and respective related processes:
    - *Applying and Upholding Existing Human Rights Frameworks in Digital Contexts;*
    - *Digital Development and Connectivity;*
    - *Data Privacy and Sovereignty;*
    - *Information Integrity;*
    - *Illegal and Harmful Online Content;*
    - *Upholding Multistakeholder Model for Internet Governance and Commitment to the IGF;*
    - *AI and Emerging Technologies.*
- Following internal discussions with their GDC negotiators, the US noted there was a proposal to remove the policy topic on AI.

- The Netherlands noted there is value in keeping the policy topic “AI and Emerging Technology”, and suggested having a bilat with the US to discuss further.
- The US noted that following internal discussion, the issue of describing the GDC Paper as a “policy paper” was raised, highlighting the difficulty of having governments agree on set policy positions, and instead suggested reframing the document as a background paper.
  - It was further noted that broadening the policy paper to a background paper on technology and human rights to be used in multilateral negotiations would enable its use as a resource for other relevant UN processes taking place in 2024 and 2025, including WSIS+20 and the Pact for the Future.
- The SU noted they will continue to work with the US and the Netherlands to populate the document and reframe it as a background paper.
  - The US will revert internally to check whether the point on “AI and Emerging Technology” can still be included in the reframed document.

**Decision>>** SC Members agreed to reframe the Global Digital Compact (GDC) Paper into a broader Background Paper to be used by Member States as a resource in multilateral negotiations and discussions around digital technologies and human rights.

**Action>>** SC Members are asked to consider the above identified categories for structuring the background paper for multilateral negotiations on digital technologies and human rights, noting the proposal from the US to remove “AI and Emerging Technologies”. The deadline to provide any objections or feedback around the categories and the US’ proposal is **COB Wednesday, 13 December**.

### **Geneva SCM Takeaways**

- Due to limited time, the SU suggested collecting SC feedback on the Geneva SCM in writing.

**Action>>** SC Members to share feedback on the Geneva Strategy and Coordination Meeting via email to the Support Unit.

### **Program of Action 2023**

- The US thanked SC Members for their feedback on the 2023 PoA during the Geneva SCM.
- The US noted the following activities will continue into 2024:
  - Development of the Pledge to Incorporate Responsible AI Practices in Government Development, Procurement, and Use of AI.
  - Development of a Joint Statement on Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence, which will be jointly published with the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse.
    - The US noted they are currently looking at how to align the language of the draft statement with FOC language.

### **Program of Action 2024**

- The Netherlands noted they are integrating the comments they received during the Geneva SCM and are looking to share the Second Draft of the PoA 2024 shortly.
- The Netherlands highlighted their recent elections and affirmed that the change in incoming government is not expected to significantly impact their work on the FOC.