

# Steering Committee Meeting #3

Wednesday, 27 March 2024

Attended: Netherlands (Chair 2024); Canada, Estonia, Germany, Ghana, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States; FOC Support Unit.

## Welcome

- The SU welcomed members to the third Steering Committee call in 2024 under the Netherlands' Chairship.

## Housekeeping Updates

- **SU Updates** (*please note these updates were not delivered in the call to allow more time for discussion*)
  - The FOC hosted the session "Upholding Information Integrity Online to Reinforce Democracy and Human Rights" at the Summit for Democracy in Seoul earlier this week.
    - The session also launched the [Joint Statement on Information Integrity Online and Elections](#), which has now been published on the Coalition's [website](#).
  - Last week, as Chair of the FOC, the Netherlands also co-hosted a side-event on the sidelines of the 55th UN Human Rights Council together with Austria and the OHCHR 'Human Rights – A Guiding Compass for the Global Digital Compact'. The event focused on how the GDC text can be solidly anchored in human rights, and unpacked the proposal by the UN Secretary General to establish the Digital Human Rights Advisory Service (DHRAS).
  - The FOC-AN have developed Reactive Advice on Internet Governance as a response to the request for advice from the Netherlands; the advice will be presented in the 21 March FOC-wide call.
  - The [FOC-AN open call](#) for applications are open until Sunday, 24 March. 55 diverse applications have been received until now.
- **Past Meetings and Events:**
  - **21 March** (capital): **FOC Updates and Discussion on Key Internet & AI Governance Processes** (*virtual*)
  - **25 March** (Geneva, capital, New York): **FOC Stakeholder Outreach Workshop on Internet Governance** (1st event) (*Geneva, Switzerland*)
- **Upcoming Meetings and Events:**
  - **3 April** (New York, capital): **Strategic Discussion: The FOC's Position in Upcoming Global** (*New York, US*)
  - **22 April** (Geneva, capital, New York): **FOC Stakeholder Outreach Workshops on Internet Governance** (2nd event) (*Geneva, Switzerland*)
  - **23 - 25 April:** **Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum** (*Accra, Ghana*)
    - The FOC will be organising a public session at the event, and engaging with local stakeholders.
  - **29-30 April:** **NetMundial+10** (*São Paulo, Brazil*)
    - The FOC is exploring sessions at the event, and plans to engage with local stakeholders.
  - (TBC) **31 May:** **Strategy and Coordination Meeting** (*Geneva, Switzerland; margins of WSIS Forum*)
  - **18-19 June:** **UNESCO International Conference on digital platforms governance: Building a Network of Networks** (*Dubrovnik, Croatia*)
    - The FOC is exploring possible engagement.

## Program of Action 2024 Updates

- The Netherlands noted the coordination meetings on 21 (virtual) and 25 (Geneva) of March, which included concrete discussions on the GDC and other relevant processes related to the governance of digital technologies, and contributed to shaping the FOC priorities in the GDC and beyond.

- The Netherlands flagged the upcoming meetings on 3 April (New York), and 22 April (Geneva) relevant to advancing Goal 1 of the PoA, and called for capital representatives to join the discussions.
- FOC sub-entity provided updates on the groups' work plans and upcoming activities:
  - **Task Force on AI and Human Rights (TFAIR)** (led by Germany and ICNL)
    - TFAIR held its first meeting on 26 March, and is finalising its work plan, which will be shared with FOC Members shortly.
    - In the coming months, TFAIR will focus on ongoing political debates on AI governance, and will be looking to engage with the High-Level Advisory Body on AI.
    - In the second part of the year, in the period of GDC implementation, the TF will be engaging in practical activities such as monitoring human rights abuses related to AI.
  - **Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS)** (led by the UK, Access Now, and GNI)
    - This year, TFIS will be building on a number of topics identified in 2023 that are of particular significance, including Internet shutdowns and elections, and Internet shutdowns in times of conflict.
    - The TF will continue to work on shifting global norms, building on the work of the G7, and providing input into relevant processes.
    - The UK also noted it is working with the Netherlands on operationalising the [FOC Terms of Reference](#) (ToR) commitment for Member States to self-report on domestic and foreign policy efforts to support Internet freedom through their United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and to bring forward recommendations around Internet freedom.
    - The first meeting will be taking place in April, and is likely to focus on elections.
    - Following the first meeting, TFIS plans to explore organising a session on Internet shutdowns in times of conflict, and is exploring developing language around the humanitarian context.
    - The co-Chairs are looking at opportunities for the TF to be more visible externally and engage in external activities.
  - **Task Force on Information Integrity Online (TFIIO)** (led by Denmark, the Netherlands and Wikimedia Foundation) (*please note the SU delivered updates on behalf of the TF in the absence of Denmark*)
    - TFIIO is working on a blueprint which will serve as a guide to address challenges facing governments, industries, civil society and other stakeholders in the context of the complexities of the online information ecosystem.
      - It is currently being drafted by the TF, and will include key pillars which are foundational for a healthy online information ecosystem that protects and promotes human rights and democracy.

## Discussion

### **Program of Action (PoA) 2024 Goal 1 Implementation** (*Advancing a human rights-based and multistakeholder approach in Internet and digital tech governance processes*)

- The SU reiterated the 21 and 25 March coordination meetings on FOC engagement in Internet and AI governance processes which provided an opportunity to advance discussions on the identified FOC priorities.
  - The Netherlands summarised the key points raised in the meetings, noting there was general agreement among participants around the identified priorities, with discussions on how to advance and adapt them to address anticipated contentious issues in upcoming negotiations.
  - These documents will be carried forward to the meeting with the New York Diplomatic Network on 3 April, and then advanced in the second workshop taking place on 22 April in Geneva.
- The SU noted the FOC-AN is also looking to draft resources for Members on topics including the multistakeholder model of the Internet and digital public infrastructure, to support these discussions.

- The US noted there were no disagreements around the identified FOC priorities in the meetings, highlighting the alignment with the FOC's mandate, and noted appreciation for transparency among networks and including capital representatives in the relevant discussions.
  - The US flagged the importance of including GDC negotiators in FOC discussions relating to the process, and encouraged SC Members to prompt their negotiators to join the meetings in order to avoid perceptions of running parallel negotiation processes.
  - The US flagged it appreciated the opportunity to have a government-only meeting on 21 March, noting the importance of also having multistakeholder discussions.
    - The Netherlands noted that the 22 April workshop in Geneva will include two segments; one multistakeholder and one government-only.
- The US inquired when the updated priorities will be shared, and if there is space to shift the New York 3 April meeting.
  - The Netherlands noted the priorities will be shared shortly, and that they will revert back on the event date.
- The SU noted the priority to increase global South participation and engagement in the ongoing meetings and events.

### **In-Person Steering Committee (SC) Meeting**

- Following calls for an in-person meeting of capital level representatives, the Netherlands is exploring the potential of holding an SC meeting on the margins of DRIF (23-25 April - Accra, Ghana) or NETmundial (29-30 April - Sao Paulo, Brazil).
- The SU circulated a form requesting SC members to indicate their planned attendance at these events.
  - Input received:
    - 4 members confirmed attendance to NetMundial
    - 1 member confirmed attendance to DRIF, and an additional 2 members indicated they would attend if there was an SC meeting confirmed.
- The Netherlands proposed having an in-person meeting on the margins of NetMundial on Day 0 (Sunday), with the possibility of those who cannot attend in-person to join virtually.
  - Switzerland noted that while the main FOC points of contact will not be participating in person, they will have representatives who will be able to join in person.
  - The US inquired, considering the results of the survey and that a Strategy and Coordination Meeting (SCM) will be held at the end of May, whether there is a need for an SC meeting at one of these events.
    - Switzerland noted agreement.
  - The UK noted that their FOC points of contact would not be attending NetMundial, however noted that it would have been useful for the SC to meet separately earlier in the year, not necessarily attached to one of these events.
    - That said, the UK noted the difficulties in identifying an appropriate time considering the many external events.
  - Estonia noted the need for more resolve in holding SCM meetings in global Majority countries, highlighting this as a crucial effort to increase engagement from these countries.
    - Estonia also empathised with difficulties around scheduling, noting the benefit of organising these in advance to increase buy-in.

### **FOC-AN elections**

- The SU recapped the process for FOC-AN elections:
  - Following a call for AN members to express interest in continuing to serve on the network, 6 seats became vacant.
  - The call for applications received more than 80 submissions, for which the majority are from the global South.
  - The election committee is currently reviewing submissions, and will be agreeing on a list of candidates to recommend to the rest of the FOC-AN and Steering Committee for approval, which will be shared in mid-April.
- The SU also noted that the SC had been asked to provide feedback to the updates to the FOC-AN Terms of Reference, with no objections raised to the revision.

- The SU noted that due to the quality of the applications and limited seats available, the FOC-AN co-Chairs are hoping to explore other mechanisms for stakeholders to engage with the FOC, which could include utilising the existing task force external consultee groups and extending invitations to FOC events.
- The Netherlands noted the need to increase cross-regional diversity within the FOC-AN, while still also having stakeholder group balance, noting ongoing discussions with FOC-AN co-Chairs on this topic.
  - The US and Netherlands inquired about expanding the number of FOC-AN representatives considering the quality of many applicants, or alternatively thinking of mechanisms to allow engagement of those who are not successful in the application process but could contribute to the FOC's work.
    - The SU noted that this can be proposed to the FOC-AN.
    - The SU also noted the FOC-AN ToR could be reopened by the SC, should the group agree.
  - The SU noted the possibility of asking current FOC-AN Members to step down to allow more space for new Members, with which the US agreed, noting the need to make the membership more global.
  - Switzerland agreed with the problem of representation, noting that this could be a reflection of the lack of diverse representation in the SC and in other FOC meetings.
    - The SU noted it has been able to facilitate travel and funding for FOC-AN Members to attend FOC meetings.

**Action>>** The Netherlands to decide on next steps relating to suggestions or actions that can be taken during the FOC-AN election process, and liaise with the FOC-AN co-Chairs.

#### AOB

- The US noted that the zero draft of the FOC AI Pledge has been circulated with the Steering Committee for feedback until 3 April.
  - The US noted a draft was shared with participants of the TFAIR workshop held in Berlin in December 2023 after which the US incorporated received feedback into the draft that is now under review with the SC.
  - Following a round of comments from the SC, the US noted it expects a substantial rewrite of the document considering the recent developments around AI (the EU AI Act, the UNGA AI resolution, the Council of Europe AI Convention), after which the SC will have another opportunity to provide comments before the next draft is circulated with the full FOC.
  - The US welcomed suggestions around the value add of the pledge, or whether the document should be of a different nature (eg. a joint statement).
- The UK, as co-Chair of TFIS, proposed utilising the FOC's comms channels to highlight external outputs which align with FOC principles, in this case the ACHPR's resolution on Internet Shutdowns and Elections in Africa.
- The SU noted that during the FOC-AN March monthly call, concerns were raised on the use of X/Twitter for FOC external communications, in light of recent developments with the platform which are not aligned with the FOC's principles.
- The Netherlands flagged the upcoming UNESCO International Conference on digital platforms governance: Building a Network of Networks, to be held in Dubrovnik, Croatia, noting that UNESCO has reached out to the Netherlands in relation to FOC engagement and support for the conference.
- The Netherlands also noted the FOC session on human rights and technical standards for AI technologies has been accepted as part of the WSIS Forum in May in Geneva, with more information to be shared shortly.

**Action>>** SC Members are invited to share thoughts and suggestions on utilising FOC comms channels to highlight external outputs and the FOC's use of X as a communication channel, in advance of the topic being revisited in the next SC meeting.

**Action>>** SC Members are invited to share thoughts relating to the possibility of the FOC co-hosting or

organising a Day 0 event during the upcoming UNESCO conference on digital platforms governance, which will be revisited in the next SC meeting.