The Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) is a group of 42 countries deeply committed to respecting, promoting, and protecting human rights for all—both online and offline. We strongly support inclusive and open multistakeholder approaches to the governance of digital technologies. We reaffirm the necessity of multistakeholder collaboration, including between governments, civil society, the private sector, international organizations, media, the technical and academic communities, and advocate for the development and use of digital technologies in ways that respect human rights and the rule of law, support democracy, promote inclusive governance,[1] and accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The FOC is concerned by efforts[2] to leverage UN processes to centralize the governance of the Internet, data, digital and other emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), through multilateral bodies and to exclude the meaningful participation[3] of all stakeholders and their vital contributions. Such a fundamental shift away from the existing inclusive and open multistakeholder approach, which has contributed to the rapid innovation of digital technologies and the Internet and has guided the work of the UN system since the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS),[4] could legitimize repressive digital practices, hinder innovation and inclusive economic growth, diminish the decentralized nature of the Internet, lead to restrictions on freedom of expression online, and ultimately have a chilling effect on the full promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The governance of digital technologies needs to include the active and meaningful participation of all stakeholders to fully address a digital future for all that is inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure. We reaffirm the primary role of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in facilitating multistakeholder discussion on Internet governance issues and welcome the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines that complement and operationalize the NETmundial principles,[5] and underline the need to

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[1] Freedom Online Coalition, *Ottawa Agenda,* 2023.
https://freedomonlinecoalition.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FOC-Ottawa-Agenda.pdf
[2] Internet governance interrupted - DFRLab
[3] Defined in the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines as inclusive, accessible, transparent, and effective mechanisms that include diverse voices by default.
[4] The Geneva Declaration of Principles, focusing digital technologies on individuals, importantly reads "We, the representatives of the peoples of the world," and emphasizes the role of "all stakeholders."
[5] Netmundial+10, *Multistakeholder Statement: Strengthening Internet governance and digital policy Processes,* 2024. OutcomeDocument-20240430.docx (netmundial.br)

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protect and promote meaningful multistakeholder participation in Internet and digital governance.

The FOC recognizes that multistakeholder processes must evolve to address emerging and complex challenges. This necessitates elevating the voices of traditionally excluded groups, such as youth, women and girls, and other persons who may be in vulnerable situations, as well as other underrepresented groups, particularly from Global South countries, at the UN and other international fora.[6] We believe that strengthened multistakeholder processes help to ensure that the digital governance needs and concerns of all stakeholders are addressed and their rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. We hold that stakeholders should have the necessary information, resources, skills, and equitable access to meaningfully participate in these processes. Enabling such participation requires substantially lowering barriers to participation for all.

The FOC recalls its previous 2020 Joint Statement on Digital Inclusion, which calls on States to facilitate, reinforce, and develop multistakeholder models of Internet governance, including building the capacity of civil society to safely and meaningfully participate in fora like the IGF, either virtually or in person.[7] We also recall the 2020 Joint Statement on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, which calls on States to promote international multistakeholder engagement in the development of relevant norms, rules, and standards for the development, procurement, use, certification, and governance of AI systems that, at a minimum, are consistent with international human rights law.[8] We further recall the 2024 Joint Statement on Technical Standards and Human Rights in the context of Digital Technologies, which recognizes that multistakeholder collaboration in a number of Standards Developing Organizations with an open, voluntary standards model based on, inclusive, bottom-up participation by all stakeholders and an industry-led, consensus-based approach has been instrumental in defining the open, global, decentralized, resilient, reliable, secure, accessible and interoperable nature of the Internet.[9]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Freedom Online Coalition (FOC). *Joint Statement on Digital Inclusion*. 2020. FOC-Joint-Statement-on-Digital-Inclusion.pdf (freedomonlinecoalition.com)

[8] Freedom Online Coalition (FOC). *Joint Statement on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights.* 2020. FOC-Joint-Statement-on-Artificial-Intelligence-and-Human-Rights.pdf (freedomonlinecoalition.com)

[9] Freedom Online Coalition (FOC). *Joint Statement on Technical Standards and Human Rights in the Context of Digital Technologies.* 2024. Joint Statement on Technical Standards and Human Rights in the Context of Digital Technologies - Freedom Online Coalition)

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We, the FOC, renew our commitment to inclusive, bottom-up and open multistakeholder approaches to the governance of digital technologies and to sustained, meaningful dialogue and engagement with all stakeholders to share knowledge and expertise, at all levels.

Once the President of the General Assembly appoints WSIS+20 Co-facilitators, we recommend, inter alia, they are guided by and embrace modalities that ensure meaningful multistakeholder participation, transparency and inclusion by posting clear and timely information about the process on the website, expanding observer accreditations and open processes to accredited non-member state observers, and strengthening intersessional consultations with non-governmental stakeholders while promoting opportunities for their participation in informal negotiations and written feedback. This can be done through the establishment of a multistakeholder group of experts, cognizant of equitable geographical and gender representation, that could act as a sounding board for text proposals themselves.

We call on States to promote and reaffirm:

- As appropriate, the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines outlined in the NETmundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement on strengthening Internet governance and other policy processes of developing digital resources necessary to reach the SDGs;
- Multistakeholder principles, including those outlined in the 2030 Agenda, the Ottawa Agenda, and the Global Digital Compact (GDC).

We further call on States to:

- Implement the renewed commitment in the GDC towards the multistakeholder approach of Internet governance that includes all stakeholders, and strengthen meaningful and transparent dialogue and engagement with stakeholders to share knowledge and expertise;
- Meaningfully collaborate with all stakeholders, ensuring diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and geographical representation, through UN processes like the forthcoming GDC follow-up and implementation and the WSIS+20 overall review;
- Seek to include the participation of non-governmental experts, including from the technical community, civil society, academia, and the private sector, on delegations to UN events, meetings, negotiations, and conferences;

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- Advocate for all stakeholders to have the opportunity to submit written submissions, either individually, collectively, or in collaboration with interested States, and to deliver oral statements during substantive plenary meetings, dedicated technical thematic groups, and review sessions at the UN, either in person or virtually;
- Expand accessibility of stakeholder engagement methods by enabling meaningful opportunities for online consultations and remote engagement, considering not only access but the online experience itself, with special attention to novice or non-skilled users of ICTs and members of vulnerable or marginalized groups, and discrepancies in access across demographics and abilities, including geography, location/area, gender, class, ethnic background, language and differently abled individuals;
- Seek to ensure security through measures to prevent, monitor, and redress any reprisals and intimidation for collaboration and participation online and in-person;
- Support and sponsor existing and upcoming global, regional, and national multistakeholder events, including those organized by the UN, and meaningful participation of non-state stakeholders from Global South countries;
- Contribute to and support the IGF's sustainability and promote diverse, timely stakeholder participation, and transparent feedback processes;
- Contribute to broader efforts to enhance civil society access to the UN, including via the #UNmute[10] campaign;
- Continue and further enhance FOC-coordination, among Members and with the FOC Advisory Network, to develop more effective multistakeholder approaches in the context of multilateral negotiations.

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[10] #Unmute | Forus

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