

**Attended:** Netherlands (Chair 2024); Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Switzerland, UK, US; Support Unit (SU)

### Welcome / Opening Remarks

- The SU welcomed Members, including their high-level representatives, to the twelfth and last Steering Committee (SC) meeting of 2024, hosted in-person at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2024 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The SU thanked Members for their continuous support and engagement in the FOC and highlighted the work of the Chair and the SC in FOC's successful coordination efforts around relevant governance processes in 2024.
- Ernst Noorman, Ambassador at Large for Cyber Affairs, Netherlands, provided opening remarks, noting successfully completed activities under the Netherlands' Chairship of the FOC, including regional outreach, participation in a variety of international fora, efforts to work closely with a range of stakeholders, increasing Member engagement, as well as work related to the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Amb. Noorman also thanked the SC Members for their support in ensuring the implementation of the 2024 Program of Action (PoA) and welcomed Estonia, the upcoming Chair of the FOC in 2025.

### Housekeeping

- The SU provided housekeeping updates, noting:
  - This is the last meeting of the current SC cohort. The next cohort, which will serve under the Estonian Chairship in 2025, will be confirmed by the end of January, when it is set to have its first meeting.
  - SU's Program of Activities, guiding SU's work to support the FOC's rhythm of business and the implementation of the PoA, will be shared with the minutes of this meeting for Members' awareness.
    - SU will be working with Estonia to identify priorities, such as capacity building and internal communications among the FOC, to support the 2025 PoA.
  - Following a period for objections from the SC, Taiwan's Observer status will be confirmed and renewed for a period of two years in February 2025.
- The SU provided a breakdown of FOC outputs:
  - The [Joint Statement on the Future of the Multistakeholder Approach at the United Nations](#) passed silence and has now been published on the FOC [website](#).
  - Joint Statement on the Adoption of the UN Convention Against Cybercrime
    - Netherlands thanked SC Members for the provided edits and confirmed comments are being consolidated with the aim to share the statement for silence procedure shortly. *[Please note that the statement has since been shared for silence procedure, ending COB Tuesday, 7 January.]*
    - Members discussed the value of pushing the statement out without further delays, with US noting the importance of having a strong statement despite delays.
  - **The Joint Statement on Digital Repression in Venezuela**
    - Netherlands thanked Canada for the co-drafting and bilateral outreach support, and noted it is clear that it will be challenging to achieve consensus among the Coalition. Netherlands highlighted the importance of unity among European Union (EU) Member States that are in the FOC, noting it might be challenging to achieve that in the context of this statement.
    - Netherlands noted the above-mentioned challenges, as well as discussions with the FOC Advisory Network, as something to reflect on and take into account in guiding FOC's future responses to human rights violations.

- US congratulated Netherlands for their work and underscored consensus should be the goal, but not the purpose of the Coalition, noting constraints to react in a timely manner. US recommended the FOC considers the Media Freedom Coalition's solutions on country-specific statements.
  - US further called for a reflection on the modalities and noted the ability to respond timely in certain situations as a benefit to continuing their engagement in the FOC.
  - US noted that from their national perspective, shaping global norms is of limited value-add in the international space and highlighted previous conversations on the FOC being more reactive, providing a recap of the process that took place to update the TOR.
- Netherlands noted the Coalition is struggling to deliver country-specific statements given above-mentioned constraints, including internal challenges and with other Members, based on the established modalities.
  - Netherlands welcomed reflections on whether a smaller number of signatories signal a strong statement or a Coalition with differing opinions within.
- UK noted consensus as important, and if there should be an impasse, it prompted the FOC to think about the Members on the ground who will be representing the Coalition.
  - Netherlands noted in this current context, it is the Members on the ground who seem to have challenges signing onto the statement.
- Estonia noted the need to refocus the statement given time delays and referenced points made at The Hague SCM in November on the need to discuss the consensus nature of the Coalition, including finding ways to move forward given the continuous expansion of the FOC.
- **The Joint Statement on Protecting Human Rights and Preventing Internet Shutdowns in Times of Conflict**
  - UK thanked Members for their engagement in the development, confirming that the statement is in its final stage before it proceeds to silence. UK is currently reconciling FOC and FOC-AN comments and is aiming to share the statement for silence before the end of 2024.
- The SU provided a breakdown of FOC deadlines:
  - The Expressions of Interest to join the 2025 SC cohort is open until Thursday, 19 December. TBC if the deadline will be extended. *[Please note that the deadline has since been extended until **Monday, 20 January**]*
  - The Expressions of Interest to chair the Coalition in 2026 remains open. *[Please note the deadline is currently **end of February**]*
- The SU provided an overview of FOC engagement at this year's IGF:
  - Sunday, 15 December
    - [Inclusive Multistakeholderism: Tackling Internet Shutdowns](#)
    - [Human Rights Impacts of AI on Marginalized Populations](#)
  - Tuesday, 17 December:
    - [A Rights-Respecting Approach to Emerging Tech Development](#)
  - Wednesday, 18 December:
    - FOC and FOC-AN Reception at the Embassy of the Netherlands in Riyadh
  - Thursday, 19 December:
    - [Ensuring an Inclusive and Rights-Respecting Digital Future](#)

#### **Program of Action/ Chairship Updates:**

- Netherlands provided updates on the 2024 Chairship:

- Netherlands thanked Members and their colleagues in capital, and in the Geneva and New York diplomatic networks for their engagement, and encouraged all Members to participate in the upcoming IGF sessions.
  - Netherlands highlighted the diversifying Membership by noting the recently-joined 42nd Member, and 4th new Member in 2024 - [Armenia](#).
  - Netherlands noted a number of thematic statements produced in 2024 and reiterated challenges with issuing country-specific statements.
  - Netherlands thanked the SU for their support during the Chairship.
- SU thanked the Netherlands for their Chairship and leadership in 2024.
- Estonia provided updates on the upcoming 2025 Chairship:
  - SU confirmed the 2025 PoA has passed silence.
  - Estonia noted they will continue the work from 2024 and further focus on specific issues, such as Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). Leading activity on this issue will be drafting DPI principles at the beginning of next year.
    - Estonia noted engagement with the global South as a priority, continuing the Netherlands' leadership, including looking for partners outside the FOC.
    - Estonia noted they will focus on increasing Member engagement with more details to come in January 2025.
    - Estonia confirmed the plans to hold a virtual high-level meeting call on Thursday, 23 January. Invitation is forthcoming.
  - US highlighted DPI and WSIS as important
    - US further enquired about Estonia's plans to engage with the FOC-AN on the UN Convention Against Cybercrime.
      - Estonia noted that an approach will be shared in January, and political departments will be engaged on possible options, respectively.
  - UK noted its Chairship of the Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS) will come to an end.
  - Canada noted support to continue discussions on increasing Member engagement.

### Discussion Items:

#### **WSIS+20 Coordination and Increasing FOC Member Engagement**

- SU presented an [overview of the WSIS+20 process timeline](#) and key milestones.
- SU noted that drawing on the approach to the GDC process, the FOC can aim to identify key opportunities for the Coalition to leverage its various mechanisms, including capital level diplomacy, relevant diplomatic networks, FOC sub-entities, and the FOC-AN, to support Members' States engagement in the WSIS process. SU reiterated FOC's working methods and presented a range of opportunities for Members to consider when thinking about FOC's engagement in the process:
  - Information sharing and capacity building
  - Diplomatic coordination
  - Advocacy
- Driven by experience of coordinating around the GDC process, SU suggested the following timeline for the above approach:
  - **January** - Capacity building and information sharing around the process / raising awareness of Members' national positions in WSIS+20;
  - **Beginning - mid February** - Engagement through the FOC diplomatic networks, including multistakeholder workshops and strategic discussions;
  - **End of February** - RightsCon capital level strategy meeting to develop priority positions, including through a simulation of WSIS negotiations, and gathering multistakeholder input from the FOC-AN through Joint Roundtable;
  - **March** - consolidation of positions and resources, engagement with co-facilitators, if appointed;
  - **April** - UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD negotiations.

- Switzerland noted the need to focus on key elements of the process, including the modalities, the CSTD report, the High-Level Forum, and the appointment of the co-facilitators and the secretariat.
  - UK noted the importance of being proactive on the modalities despite delays or process ambiguity, including establishing a vision of what the process should look like.
    - UK highlighted exploring how these arguments can be brought to G77 Members.
- Canada noted three important milestones in the WSIS process:
  - 7 - 11 April: CSTD's 28th Session
  - 7 - 11 July: WSIS+20 High-Level Event in Geneva
  - UN General Assembly's 80th Session
  - Canada further noted the complicated process, including other parallel activities and processes, such as the Scientific Panel on AI, facilitated by the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Spain in New York, a global dialogue on AI governance, and the CSTD data governance working group. Canada highlighted the need to identify milestones for FOC engagement.
- US noted the timeline crunch and the need to decide on FOC's plan of action at the start of next year. US prompted Members to think about the Coalition's value-add to the process, while being mindful to support colleagues in New York and not to create a parallel negotiation process.
- Estonia prompted Members to identify points for FOC's engagement by the January SC meeting and highlighted the importance of language coordination, suggesting the FOC recreates the [FOC Proposals for FOC Engagement in the GDC and the Pact for the Future](#).
- Switzerland noted the importance of agreeing on an objective and identifying steps to break down the divide with the G77 and attract partners - e.g. on issues such as human rights, where G77 Members seem not to hold common positions, as well as DPI and connectivity. Switzerland posited the FOC can play a role in conveying these messages, arguing for a strategy that deals with all relevant issues, from connectivity, to human rights, DPI, AI, and data governance.
- UK noted it has been challenging understanding G77 countries' approach to the GDC, and as G77 Members' alignment is becoming more seamless, it has become more difficult to identify countries to partner with on language development. UK noted this provides an opportunity for the Coalition to explore areas of common ground, rather than opposing points, that would add momentum to those partnerships.
  - UK also noted the importance of preparation and anticipation of positions on language, highlighting that a set-up where governments provide edits on a line by line basis has been helpful and practical.
- US suggested FOC Members can share information following consultations within regional blocks with G77 Members.
- Denmark noted the need to understand G77 Members' positions ahead of approaching them, adopting a proactive rather than reactive approach, ensuring better alignment along regional blocks. Denmark also noted its upcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU for the period July-December 2025.
- US noted its efforts during its FOC Chairship in 2023 to support a united front, including through creating the FOC Paper for Multilateral Negotiations, and encouraging all missions to use the document.
  - US highlighted that SC meetings need to be more action-oriented, including on how to reach G77 Members within the FOC, suggesting the Chair and SC work together.
- Germany reiterated the usefulness of documents encompassing agreed-upon language and requested that this point is brought to the agenda in the new year.
- UK noted SC can decide how to leverage FOC's strengths at the beginning of next year, underscoring that many Members do not have capacity even at capital level; thus, information sharing is vital. UK proposed the Coalition identifies a special representative from the global

South to lead conversations with global South Members on behalf of the FOC, in an effort to break the silos, highlighting the need for funding if this idea moves forward.

- Canada highlighted the need to ensure that colleagues in New York can understand the process and comprehend the substance when it comes to WSIS.
  - Estonia noted the challenge of many countries not having representatives working on digital rights in New York.
  - Netherlands noted its efforts to revive the New York diplomatic network and bring it into discussions through capital. It further noted the importance of FOC Members being aligned in negotiations and when faced with coordinated positions from others.
- Netherlands noted for some Members the value-add of the FOC is in the coordination and capacity building around these processes, not necessarily only language development.
- SU noted Members should consider both national and FOC-wide priorities regarding WSIS.
- Canada suggested a more gradual milestone approach - focusing on a step by step basis, tackling one element of the process at a time, rather than working on a master strategy.
- US noted the need to provide space for new Members to share their perspectives and experiences, and highlight national and regional initiatives.

#### FOC Sub-Entities and Steering Committee 2025

- FOC Sub-Entities:
  - UK noted it is moving on from leading TFIS, highlighting the value of the task force and noting it is in conversations with other Members, including Norway, regarding passing the baton.
    - UK further noted the Minister for Women and Equalities, Anneliese Dodds, has amplified TFIS' engagement at IGF on social media and suggested that more Members amplify the Coalition's engagement.
    - SU noted the importance of transparent communication with the AN regarding any task forces' leadership changing or mandate ending.
  - US noted that task forces can be established also later in the year, requiring a workplan and a mandate proposal from the relevant governmental lead.
  - The SU noted that the Task Force on AI and Human Rights' [mandate extension request](#) will be attached with the minutes of this meeting, for which Members will be asked to note any objections.
- SC 2025
  - SU noted so far Germany, Ghana, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and US have expressed interest to join the SC in 2025, with six slots remaining open. *[Please note that since the meeting, Finland has also joined the list to serve on the SC in 2025.]*
  - Denmark noted while information integrity is still a priority, confirmation is pending regarding continuing its mandate on the SC.
  - US requested that Members raise the SC open slots to Global South Members during upcoming bilats.