

FOC Steering Committee Monthly Meeting #7 2024

Wednesday, 31 July | 14.00 - 15.00 UTC

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

Welcome / Opening Remarks

- The Support Unit (SU) welcomed FOC members to the seventh Steering Committee (SC) meeting of 2024.

Housekeeping

- The SU provided several housekeeping updates, including:
 - Slovenia joining as the [40th Member](#) of the Coalition.
 - The publication of the [FOC Joint Statement \(JTS\) on the UN Convention Against Cybercrime](#) on the FOC website which received widespread media coverage from several outlets¹.
 - The SU highlighted that the FOC-AN have developed [Proactive Advice](#) on the Treaty noting that the text of the future convention still does not meet international human rights law standards, creating numerous possibilities for abuse *[Please also see the FOC-AN's previous advice on the Treaty [here](#) and [here](#)]*.
 - The First Draft of the FOC Pledge to Incorporate Responsible Practices in Government Design, Development, Procurement, Deployment, and Use of AI is open for comments from the FOC and FOC-AN until **19 August**.
 - The UK, co-Chair of the FOC Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS), initiated the information and knowledge sharing process in relation to the ongoing disruption of Internet access and communication services in Bangladesh.
 - A Learning Paper on Joint Statements commissioned by the Media Freedom Online Coalition Secretariat in collaboration with the SU has been publicised, and will be made available via the FOC website shortly.

Action>> Members to provide input to the First Draft of the FOC Pledge to Incorporate Responsible Practices in Government Design, Development, Procurement, Deployment, and Use of AI by **19 August**.

Program of Action / Chairship 2024

- The Netherlands (NL) provided updates on their Chairship and PoA 2024 implementation:
 - Updates on upcoming events:
 - The third Regional Dialogue session will be organized during the [Asia-Pacific IGE](#) on 23 August in Taipei, Taiwan.
 - The event will convene regional government and non-governmental stakeholders to foster dialogue on digital issues and human rights, including the governance of the Internet and AI technologies.
 - A Ministerial Side Event on AI and Human Rights will be held on the margins of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), with the Netherlands noting more updates will be shared shortly.
 - The Netherlands encouraged Members to attend with their Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹ [UAE](#) (The Gulf), [Russia](#) (kommersant), [France](#), (France 24) [Canada](#) (The Record).

- The second FOC Strategy & Coordination Meeting of the year will take place in The Hague from 22-24 October, with Day 0 focusing on capacity building; a save the date and more information around the event will be shared shortly.
- In regard to IGF 2024, the Netherlands mentioned they are working internally to explore ways to convey ongoing concerns to the IGF Secretariat and the Saudi Arabian government.
- Updates on the Global Digital Compact (GDC):
 - The Netherlands provided a brief update on the silence procedure being broken, noting there is uncertainty about the exact paragraphs challenged by the negotiating governments. However, the topics challenged pertain to the Follow-Up Review, the risk of duplication, AI governance, and general dissatisfaction from G77 countries regarding the environmental sustainability paragraphs and language on gender-based violence.
 - The Netherlands noted that due to the current negotiations on the Pact for the Future, one more informal consultation is planned for 19 August.
 - The US noted that the FOC and FOC-AN have been heavily involved in conversations relating to the GDC, and suggest that moving forward, capital and New York points of contact, who will engage during the upcoming consultation, should be well connected to reflect the cohesion within the Coalition.
 - The US also suggested shifting the Coalition's attention to focus on avenues of engagement at the global IGF in Saudi Arabia, given the ongoing concerns.

Discussion Items

Membership Responsibilities

- The Support Unit noted that following concerns raised during the June Monthly Call regarding reports of an Internet shutdown in Kenya, the Netherlands have conducted outreach to their mission in Kenya to gather further information.
 - The Support Unit mentioned that during the review of the current FOC procedures and past frameworks, the analysis highlighted a gap relating to steps that can be taken before proceeding directly into a termination procedure.
 - The SU further clarified that according to the [FOC Terms of Reference \(ToR\)](#), the Chair or SC would call for a review of a member's compliance with the FOC ToR responsibilities. This would trigger a report developed by the SC, with support from the SU, to review the member's performance against their responsibilities.
- The Netherlands noted their mission in Kenya reported the shutdown was a singular incident and has not been repeated, noting that the current President has been leveraging the online space positively.
 - The Netherlands will continue monitoring the situation in their capacity as FOC Chair.
- Estonia noted that similar conversations are happening within the Media Freedom Coalition in relation to Slovakia, a member not upholding the Coalition's commitments.
 - They emphasized the best approach is to engage directly and diplomatically with the member before escalating to more drastic measures such as membership termination.
 - Estonia highlighted the potential risk if the member in question is part of the SC, which has decision-making responsibilities according to the ToR.

- The US noted that recent developments in Tunisia might also merit discussion and suggested exploring ways for information sharing among FOC governments in the interest of transparency, welcoming feedback on the feasibility.
- The UK emphasized the importance of ensuring transparent and fair terms and conditions to address specific questions among the entire FOC, suggesting reminding current FOC members of the expectations of being part of the Coalition to ensure accountability.
- Switzerland suggested clarifying and reviewing the available steps for addressing countries deviating from FOC's principles and commitments, ensuring transparency with the broader Coalition.

Action>> The Netherlands and Support Unit to include Membership and accountability in the upcoming SCM agenda.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

- The Support Unit noted according to the FOC ToR adopted in 2023, Members of the Coalition commit to a number of responsibilities, including **self-reporting on domestic and foreign policy efforts to support Internet freedom through their United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) reports** and other pre-existing mechanisms (*Section III: Membership, b), 7.*).
 - The SU noted the ongoing 4th cycle of the UPR. Should the Steering Committee (SC) approve, the SU proposed piloting this exercise at the 48th session (20–31 January 2025) with Italy, the only FOC Member under review noting the deadline for national reports is 7 October 2024.
 - To support FOC Member States in implementing this commitment, the Support Unit has developed a proposal outlining steps to encourage FOC Members under review in the UPR to self-report on issues related to internet freedom in their national reports. The proposal includes a suggested timeline for UPR monitoring that would assist Members in the process, with several steps that the Member could take.
 - The SU encouraged members to review the proposal circulated via email, focusing particularly on the steps identified, and to provide feedback by the next SC monthly call.
 - This timeline ensures enough time to discuss any comments with Italy and prepare for the following review in 2025.
- The US noted that the challenging timeline might not provide sufficient time for Italy to incorporate feedback. However, it will be useful to make them aware that actions are being taken by both the SC and FOC-AN Members.

Action>> SC Members to review the UPR Proposal and submit any feedback ahead of the next SC monthly call (28 August).

AOB

Internet Shutdowns in Bangladesh

- The UK raised concerns about the current situation in Bangladesh, where there have been reports of ongoing Internet shutdowns being used to deter protesters. The UK noted three elements they are focusing on through the FOC Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS):
 - Initiating an information-gathering exercise to track ongoing developments related to internet shutdowns.
 - Hosting a TFIS call open to the broader Coalition.
 - Drafting a retrospective FOC Joint Statement on Bangladesh and Internet Shutdowns, similar to the JTS developed in relation to Iran in 2022.

- The UK welcomed members to identify any blockers that may disrupt achieving consensus for such a statement.
- The US noted they are looking to the UK and TFIS leadership to initiate the drafting of the statement.
- The Netherlands echoed the UK's concerns, reporting that their mission on the ground in Bangladesh indicated the shutdowns are partial, thanks to increased pressure from the private sector and diplomatic communities.
 - The Netherlands noted that while the statement may not have a direct impact on the ground, it is still relevant for the FOC to act by developing a statement.