Attendance: Armenia, Estonia, Germany, Ghana, Luxembourg, Moldova, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland (FOC Chair 2026), the United Kingdom; FOC Support Unit.

Summary:
During the first Steering Committee (SC) meeting under Switzerland's Chairship, the Support Unit (SU) provided housekeeping updates, including on early implementation of the 2026 Program of Action (PoA), ongoing FOC processes, and upcoming events. The meeting featured an overview of Switzerland's priorities for the 2026 Chairship, and discussions on Member leadership for PoA implementation, as well as approaches to addressing internet shutdowns, including the Joint Statement on Internet Shutdowns in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Minutes

Welcome / Opening Remarks
- The Support Unit welcomed Members to the first Steering Committee meeting of 2026 under the Swiss Chairship, particularly the two new Members: Armenia and Moldova.
- Switzerland outlined its expectations for the year ahead, emphasising collaboration, early engagement on PoA implementation, and Member leadership across activities.

Housekeeping
- **SU Updates:**
    - The SU *Programme of Activities* for 2026 was shared in advance of the meeting. The document outlines SU objectives as mandated by the [FOC Terms of Reference](#) and is supported by the 2026 SU budget. Members were invited to review and provide comments by 30 January.
    - The *Task Force on AI and Human Rights (TFAIR)* will continue its mandate in 2026 following confirmation via silence procedure in December 2025. TFAIR will be co-led by Germany, the Netherlands, and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). SC Members interested in joining were encouraged to contact the SU.
    - The SU shared initial findings from the 2025 Capacity Building Programme survey, which highlighted demand for more targeted, practical, and hands-on activities. The SU will develop the 2026 iteration based on participant feedback, experience, and available budget.
    - The SU and Switzerland are in contact with the United States regarding its intention to withdraw from the FOC and are awaiting official written confirmation.

- **FOC Outputs & Processes:**
    - **Joint Statement on Internet Shutdowns in the Islamic Republic of Iran:** A draft Joint Statement has been circulated to the full Coalition for opt-in until Monday, 2 February (17:00 UTC). SC Members were encouraged to follow up domestically on the opt-in process.

    - **Diplomatic Network Workplans:** the Geneva and New York Diplomatic Network workplans are under development in coordination with Swiss leads in relevant cities. Options to launch the workplans alongside existing events are being explored.

    - **FOC Advisory Network (FOC-AN) Review:** The mandate of the current FOC-AN cohort (2024-2026) will expire during the Swiss Chairship, in June 2026. Ahead of launching the next selection process and as a condition to accepting the results of the previous selection, the Steering Committee and FOC-AN have been mandated to review the [FOC-AN Terms of Reference (ToR)](#) and align the FOC-AN selection process. FOC SU has set up the Review Committee, which is composed of FOC SU, AN co-chairs and Troika SC Members

(Switzerland, Estonia and the Kingdom of the Netherlands). The first meeting will take place in early February.

- **Upcoming Events & Meetings**
  - **4 February (14:00 UTC): PoA 2026 Online Launch I Virtual Participation**
    - Opening remarks by Bernard Maissen, Secretary of State, Director of the Federal Office of Communications, Switzerland, with contributions from Elonnai Hickok, Co-Chair of Advisory Network, and other members of the FOC community. Invitations were sent to FOC Members, Advisory Network, Geneva and New York Diplomatic Networks.
    - SC Members are encouraged to attend and register.
    - Contributions by SC Members during the dialogue are more than welcome.
  - **5 February (14:00 UTC)**: **TFAIR Learning Call I Online**
    - *TFAIR Learning Call - Debrief from the International AI Standards Summit*: linking AI policy and standards, organised by TFAIR Co-chairs Netherlands, Germany and ICNL
    - Speakers are confirmed from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).
    - Invitations were sent to TFAIR Members.
  - **18 February (10:00 local time): TFAIR Session at AI Impact Summit (16-20 February) I New Delhi, India**
    - TFAIR is organising a high-level session at the AI Impact Summit titled *"Governing Safe and Responsible AI within Digital Public Infrastructure."*
    - The President of Estonia and the State Secretary and Head of the Federal Office for Communications of Switzerland will deliver high-level opening remarks, followed by a panel discussion bringing together senior representatives from the Netherlands and Germany, alongside ICNL and other confirmed stakeholders.
  - **4-5 May (TBC): Strategy and Coordination Meeting (SCM) 1: Lusaka, Zambia**
    - Early planning for Strategy and Coordination Meeting I (SCM I) is underway, with provisional dates set for 4–5 May. These dates coincide with World Press Freedom Day, and the SU is in contact with the Media Freedom Coalition to explore potential synergies.
    - Provisional dates are also being considered for Strategy and Coordination Meeting II (SCM II) on 9–11 July, to be held following the Global Dialogue on AI Governance, the AI for Good Summit, and the WSIS+20 Forum.

Discussion items

Program of Action 2026

- Switzerland presented an overview of the three strategic goals of the [Program of Action 2026](#) and outlined planned activities across the year, including an indicative timeline of key events by quarter. The preliminary calendar of events is also available on the [Freedom Online Coalition Digital Hub](#) (FOC Members are invited to reach out to SU with suggestions for additions for the shared calendar).
- Opportunities for Steering Committee leadership and collaboration were highlighted.
  - Switzerland invited SC Members to express interest in leading or supporting specific PoA activities.
- Goal 1: Strengthening FOC engagement in global digital governance processes
  - The Netherlands indicated that it would assess internal capacity to engage on WSIS implementation and shared preliminary plans to organise a session at RightsCon.
  - Armenia requested more detailed information on planned events and confirmed participation in the India AI Impact Summit and the Human Rights Council. Armenia expressed interest in joining TFAIR learning calls. Armenia informed the SC Members of the upcoming Yerevan Dialogue in May and indicated openness to potential engagement with the FOC.
  - Sweden indicated that it plans to participate in the AI Impact Summit, RightsCon, and the AI for Good Global Summit, and expressed willingness to collaborate with other FOC Members attending these events.
  - Luxembourg shared the draft AI Impact Summit Declaration for the information of SC Members noting its relevance to TFAIR members.

- ○ SC Members discussed and shared perspectives on potential approaches to leveraging partnerships and collaboration with other relevant organisations:
  - Switzerland highlighted its strong working relationship with the Council of Europe (CoE), particularly on AI, and is exploring cooperation on capacity building or an event focused on the risk and impact assessment tool.
  - EE noted that the engagement with the EU has proven challenging despite multiple attempts, though cooperation could still be explored in the coming year. EE also underscored the success of last year's event with CoE and emphasised the value of maintaining ongoing dialogue. Regarding the OSCE, Estonia suggested exploring initiatives on the human dimension and media freedom, particularly given that CH is chairing OSCE this year, which could align with FOC's interests.
  - CH, as OSCE Chair 2026, may leverage OSCE events to create space for digital-focused initiatives and explore potential synergies.
  - Luxembourg noted that their and the NL' cyber ambassadors referenced FOC at the Cyber Dialogue in January. Many FOC members are already actively engaging in various forums and are willing to continue doing so. Luxembourg also highlighted that the International Partnership for Information and Democracy is advancing a workstream this year on safeguarding access to reliable information in the age of AI. Ukraine is confirmed as the first co-Chair and they are currently seeking a second co-Chair, which aligns closely with TFAIR's work in 2026. Regarding CoE, this year marks the first reporting cycle on the application of the CoE *Framework Convention on AI and Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law*, making dialogue on this topic particularly timely.
- Goal 2: Addressing ongoing challenges to Internet freedom and digital resilience
  - ○ Estonia expressed interest in advancing work on DPI principles, potentially through a workshop at RightsCon or in conjunction with SCM I, and suggested engaging the FOC-AN on this topic.
  - ○ The Netherlands suggested updating the [Good Practices on State Sponsored Network Disruptions](#) toolkit and the diplomatic response developed under the Task Force on Internet Shutdowns (TFIS).
  - ○ Luxembourg expressed interest in supporting activities on information integrity.
  - ○ Armenia noted that the CoE is currently gathering feedback on the Democratic Pact for Europe, which will guide organisational engagement in the coming years. Armenia emphasised its continued focus on DPI, AI, and interaction with human rights mechanisms, and confirmed it will be signing the CoE Convention on AI and Human Rights referenced by Luxembourg.
- Goal 3: Operationalising multistakeholder approaches to digital governance
  - ○ Switzerland emphasised the importance of mainstreaming inclusion and accessibility across FOC activities and governance, and invited ideas in the context of the FOC's upcoming 15th anniversary.
  - ○ Regional dialogues were discussed as a potential contribution to the anniversary, with an emphasis on clear objectives and tangible outcomes.
  - ○ The United Kingdom expressed interest in supporting work on multistakeholder and multilateral approaches.
- The discussion was rounded off by emphasising the importance of SC leadership to support and advance goals in the specific policy areas in the PoA.

Internet Shutdowns, including Joint Statement on Internet Shutdowns in the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Switzerland provided an update on the draft Joint Statement, outlining the opt-in process and broader thinking on responding to country-specific developments. Reference was made to recent internet shutdowns in Iran and Uganda, as well as relevant UN Human Rights Council dynamics.
- Sweden has welcomed the quality and ambition of the draft statement, noting the importance of maintaining strong language consistent with UN processes.
- The Netherlands also expressed appreciation to Switzerland for facilitating this process and inquired about the minimum number of countries required to opt in before the statement can be published. In response, the FOC Support Unit noted that, based on past practice, a minimum threshold of 50% of FOC members has been recommended.
- The UK noted that colleagues had raised a concern regarding a specific phrase in the Joint Statement, which has been flagged to the Support Unit.

- EE noted their contribution to the Open Technology Fund, which supports access to the internet in autocratic contexts, including work related to Iran. They also suggested that the FOC website could potentially highlight existing mechanisms that help directly support connectivity for users in Iran.
- Armenia noted that it is not in a position to participate in country-specific statements and confirmed it would opt out of the Joint Statement on Internet Shutdowns in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Luxembourg expressed support for the Joint Statement and suggested exploring a connectivity path, referencing a policy brief from WITNESS on direct-to-cell (D2C) satellite technology as an alternative to Starlink or other satellite-to-mobile solutions to maintain communications during internet shutdowns in Iran. The brief outlines concrete actions for member states to support connectivity for human rights defenders and affected populations.
- Discussion focused on whether future work should prioritise country-specific responses or broader tools and guidance, including updates to the Rapid Response Toolkit. Switzerland noted that while statements remain an option, strengthening tools and preparedness would be a priority for 2026.

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- The SU welcomed Members to the new SC cohort and noted the significance of 2026 amid a changing geopolitical context.
- The meeting closed with a reminder and invitation to attend the PoA 2026 online launch on 4 February.