

Global Digital Rights Coalition for WSIS (GDRC-WSIS): Joint Input to Elements Paper for the WSIS+20 overall review

The [Global Digital Rights Coalition for WSIS](#) (GDRC-WSIS) is a collective of civil society organisations from the Global Majority and Global North, offering our shared expertise to advance human rights and multistakeholderism in the WSIS+20 review process. We believe that the WSIS+20 review process and its outcomes should be anchored in international human rights law and standards as a prerequisite for ensuring the people-centricity of the WSIS vision, and require meaningful multistakeholder engagement and procedures.

As a collective, we submit the following recommendations to shape the development of the zero draft. Our recommendations are based on the following four themes alongside recommendations for the process:

1. Human rights
 - a. Table with language proposals on the Elements Paper
2. Digital Inclusion
 - a. Table with language proposals on the Elements Paper
3. The multistakeholder model and the role of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)
 - a. Table with language proposals on the Elements Paper
4. Interaction of the WSIS with other Internet-related public policy processes
 - a. Table with language proposals on the Elements Paper
5. Process recommendations

This submission is endorsed by the following organisations:

- Access Now
- ARTICLE 19
- Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
- Centre for Communication Governance (CCG), National Law University Delhi
- CyberPeace Institute
- Data Privacy Brasil
- Derechos Digitales
- Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)
- European Center for Not for Profit Law (ECNL)

- Fundación Multitudes
- Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)
- Global Network Initiative (GNI)
- Global Partners Digital (GPD)
- International Center for Not for Profit Law (ICNL)
- Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
- Paradigm Initiative (PIN)
- Tech Global Institute (TGI)
- World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)

Human rights

The zero draft should reflect a more balanced, gender-responsive and human rights-based approach. The zero draft should anchor the WSIS vision in international human rights law and standards, referring to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other human rights treaties, the United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. It should underscore the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights and accurately reflect states' obligations under international human rights treaties, emphasising the promotion and protection of rights, rather than relying on punitive or security-oriented language.

The role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other UN human rights mechanisms should be explicitly recognised as central to Internet and digital policymaking. Over the past decade, the OHCHR has led research and initiatives at the intersection of digital technologies and human rights, including the publication of authoritative guidance and reports and the establishment of the [B-Tech Project](#).¹ The OHCHR's leadership role in digital governance was recognised in the Global Digital Compact (GDC), including the voluntary Digital Human Rights Advisory Service (paragraphs 24 and 69). We recommend ensuring formal recognition of the role of the OHCHR as an implementing entity by assigning it a role as a co-facilitator of Action Line 10, on Human Rights and Ethics, thereby securing its place in the future implementation and review of the WSIS framework.

The zero draft should underscore the human rights-enabling role of the Internet as well as the risks of human rights abuses and violations. It should refer to the potential of the Internet and digital technologies to advance the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental — in a balanced and integrated manner, as well as to hinder progress towards its achievement. The zero draft should integrate a reference to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and to the obligations of states and the responsibilities of businesses to conduct human rights due diligence and human rights impact assessment throughout the design, development, operation, use and regulation of digital technologies as a prerequisite for achieving the WSIS vision.

¹ This includes the initiation of UN Human Rights Council resolutions on the right to privacy in the digital age, as well as to the leadership of thematic reports focused on the impact of new technologies on the promotion of human rights (A/HRC/44/24), the practical application of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to the activities of technology companies (A/HRC/50/56), and the application of human rights standards to standard-setting processes for new and emerging technologies (A/HRC/53/42).

Thematic Focus Areas

Media Freedom and Journalism: The zero draft is an opportunity to ensure explicit acknowledgement of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, media freedom, and independent and public interest journalism in fostering diverse and resilient information ecosystems. It should aim to strengthen the independence and viability of media that provide access to relevant, timely, local, multilingual, and fact-based information. Such a commitment is a prerequisite to any meaningful digital content governance framework, in line with the SDG 16, the GDC, the WSIS+10 Resolution, and international human rights law and standards.

Platform Accountability: Platform accountability, including transparency in the design of content governance systems, warrants stronger attention in the zero draft. A strengthened focus on the role of platforms in shaping access to information, content distribution, and media viability is critical, particularly in light of business models and design choices that prioritise engagement over safety, privacy, and integrity. This includes addressing the impact of generative AI on information integrity and the trustworthiness of media independence and communication. Inclusion of these elements would enhance the coherence of the zero draft with international law and standards and support the broader objectives of the WSIS+20 framework.

Table with language proposals on the Elements Paper

Paragraph 2	We reaffirm the WSIS vision and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in which everyone can create, access, utilise and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, anchored in the premises and principles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other international human rights treaties, the United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.	WSIS+10 Resolution, paragraph 1
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Paragraph 8(bis)	As recognized in the WSIS+10 Resolution, the increasing use of information and communication technologies brings both environmental benefits and costs that still need to be addressed. Coordinated action by States, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders is essential to adopt mitigation, adaptation, and sustainable solutions across the life cycle of the digital technologies that respond to their environmental impact, particularly in developing and least developed countries.	WSIS+10 Resolution, paragraph 20 UNCTAD, <i>Digital Economy Report</i> , 2024 GDC, Objective 1, paragraph 11(e) SDG 13
Paragraph 9	The WSIS+20 acknowledges the need to continue and strengthen efforts to close the gender digital divide and address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, both of which remain significant barriers to achieving universal, meaningful access to the internet for women and girls and other historically marginalized groups. Gender mainstreaming, as reaffirmed in the Global Digital Compact, is essential to advancing sustainable development and should be mainstreamed through all action lines	GDC, paragraph 8(d) SDG 5 CSW67 Agreed Conclusions, preambular paragraph 46
Paragraph 17	The digital economy has expanded rapidly since WSIS, transforming trade, finance, and services through e-commerce, digital payments, and online platforms. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become a key pillar of global economic activity. To advance a global digital economy that is both inclusive and efficient, strategies are needed to ensure that no country or individual is left behind and to enhance consumer protection in alignment with international human rights law and standards.	UNCTAD, <i>Digital Trade for Development</i> , 2023 UNCTAD, <i>Digital Economy Report</i> , 2024
Paragraph 43	Human rights are central to the WSIS vision. While ICTs have the potential to strengthen the exercise of human rights, enabling access to information, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and facilitating access to development, they also pose new challenges to the exercise of human rights, including concerns related to data gathering and management, surveillance and the right to privacy. States should refrain from imposing restrictions on the free flow of information and ideas that are inconsistent with their obligations under international law, including articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, through practices such as the use of Internet shutdowns and	UN GA A/RES/78/213, paragraph 18 UN GA A/RES/79/175, paragraphs 8 and 9 GDC, paragraphs 22 and 25

	<p>online censorship to intentionally prevent or disrupt access to or the dissemination of information, and from using digital technologies to silence, unlawfully or arbitrarily surveil or harass individuals or groups, including in the context of peaceful assemblies.</p> <p>We recognize the responsibilities of all stakeholders to respect, protect and promote human rights and call on the private sector to apply the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, including through the application of human rights due diligence and impact assessments throughout the technology life cycle and through providing access to an effective remedy.</p>	
Paragraph 44	<p>We reaffirm that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online and call upon all Member States and other stakeholders to refrain from or cease the use of new and emerging technologies that are impossible to operate in compliance with international human rights law or that pose undue risks to the enjoyment of human rights.</p>	UN GA A/RES/78/265, paragraph 5
Paragraph 47	<p>Information integrity, platform accountability and the role of content regulation and self-regulation have gained greater resonance since the emergence of generative AI platforms that have increased the capability and reduced the costs of generating realistic content, including disinformation. We encourage all Member States and invite multi-stakeholders from all regions and countries, within their respective roles and responsibilities, including from the private sector, international and regional organizations, civil society, the media, academia and research institutions and technical communities and individuals, to develop, participate and support rights-based regulatory and governance approaches and frameworks related to safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems that create an enabling ecosystem at all levels, including for innovation, entrepreneurship and the dissemination of knowledge and technologies on mutually agreed terms, recognizing that effective partnership and cooperation between Governments and multi-stakeholders is necessary in developing such approaches and frameworks.</p>	UN GA A/RES/78/265, paragraph 3

Paragraph 47(bis)	<p>To uphold information integrity and safeguard media independence and viability, it is essential to recognize that journalists and media actors increasingly rely on social media platforms to reach audiences and disseminate accurate, timely, fact-based, and diverse information. However, the prevailing business models and design features of these platforms prioritize engagement over privacy, safety, and integrity, rather than promoting ethical, human rights-based design principles. Ensuring platform accountability, grounded in a human rights-based approach and user-empowerment, is necessary to address these systemic challenges, particularly in light of generative AI technologies that have exponentially increased the ease and scale of producing synthetic and misleading content, thereby further undermining public trust in the media.</p>	<p>GDC, paragraphs 34 and 35</p> <p>SDG 16</p> <p>UN/A/HRC/RES/49/23 (2022)</p> <p>UN Secretary-General's <i>Global Principles for Information Integrity</i>, June 2024</p> <p>UNESCO Platform Governance Guidelines</p>
Paragraph 48	<p>Reaffirming that any limitation on the rights to privacy and freedom of opinion and expression must comply with international human rights law, including the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, pursuit of a legitimate aim and non-discrimination. States should ensure that the development and implementation of national legislation relevant to digital technologies is compliant with obligations under international law, including international human rights law.</p>	<p>ICCPR, Article 19</p> <p>ICCPR, General Comment No. 34</p> <p>Siracusa Principles, paragraphs 10, 31, 34</p> <p>GDC, paragraph 23(a)</p>
Paragraph 49	<p>Actions need to be taken against abusive uses of ICTs such as illegal advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, all forms of child abuse, and trafficking in, and exploitation of, human beings. Other types of content that have raised concerns since WSIS include technology-facilitated gender-based violence, defamation, disinformation and the promotion of terrorism. Responses by member states must be grounded in international human rights law, including the principles of legality, necessity,</p>	<p>GA A/RES/78/213, paragraph 13</p> <p>GDC, paragraph 31(a)</p> <p>A/HRC/RES/49/31, paragraph 5</p>

	<p>proportionality, pursuit of a legitimate aim and non-discrimination.</p> <p>Member states have also committed to create a safe and secure online space for all users that ensures their mental health and well-being by defining and adopting common standards, guidelines and industry actions that are in compliance with international law, promote safe civic spaces and address transparency and accountability on digital platforms that causes harm to individuals, taking into account work under way by United Nations entities, regional organizations and multi-stakeholder initiatives.</p>	
Paragraph 50	<p>All stakeholders should actively promote information integrity, tolerance, and respect in the digital environment, safeguard media independence, protect the integrity of democratic processes, and prevent the harms associated with disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech. Efforts must include transparent and accountable responses that are evidence-based, non-discriminatory, and consistent with international human rights law, while fostering international cooperation and strengthening resilience against information manipulation and platform-enabled threats.</p>	<p>WSIS+10 Outcome Document, paragraph 47</p> <p>GDC, paragraphs 34 and 35</p> <p>A/HRC/RES/49/31, paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 6</p> <p>UN Secretary-General's <i>Global Principles for Information Integrity</i>, June 2024</p>
Paragraph 66	<p>While data is vital for achieving the SDGs, many countries lack the legal and technical safeguards and minimum capacities needed to use it in a responsible, accountable, and transparent way, while protecting privacy and other rights. Quality and reliability of data, especially in non-dominant languages, are critical to their effective deployment for development. To this end, it is urgent to advance measures to close data divides and counteract data extractivism practices while empowering and promoting the welfare of individuals and groups, based on a data justice and development-oriented approach, keeping people at the center.</p>	<p>GDC, paragraphs 8(i), 39 and 40</p> <p>A/HRC/56/68 (Report from the UN Special Rapporteur on racism), paragraphs 68 and 69</p> <p>A/74/493 (Report from the un Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty), paragraphs</p>

		81 and 82 A/RES/79/175 (UN General Assembly, the right to privacy in the digital age)
Paragraph 68	We need to emphasize the need for responsible, interoperable data governance and stronger national capacities, especially in the Global South. Growing concerns around algorithmic transparency, surveillance, data extractivism, and unequal data protection and privacy protection frameworks underscore the need for global standards, trust-based data flows, and evidence-based policymaking aligned with human rights standards and principles.	GDC, paragraph 43 A/RES/79/175 (UN General Assembly, the right to privacy in the digital age), 2024
New paragraph	While a formal request for proposals was not included in the section on 'Human rights and ethical dimensions of the Information Society', we recommend ensuring formal recognition of the role of the OHCHR as an implementing entity by assigning it a role as a co-facilitator of Action Line 10, on Human Rights and Ethics, thereby securing its place in the future implementation and review of the WSIS framework.	

Digital Inclusion

Digital divides are a global challenge affecting all societies, not only low-income countries, and extend far beyond material access. These divides manifest differently across various population groups, including women and persons with disabilities, as noted in the Elements Paper, but also encompass children, youth, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, and those in urban as well as remote and rural communities, as emphasised in both the GDC and the WSIS+10 Resolution. The zero draft should build on the Elements Paper by including reference to the structural obstacles and risks – particularly online violence – that hinder meaningful connectivity, disproportionately impacting women and girls, children, youth and historically excluded groups, and which must be explicitly addressed in efforts to close the digital divide.

Table with language proposals on the Elements Paper

Paragraph 31	Various factors impact and hinder people's ability to enjoy a safe, fulfilling, enriching, productive, and affordable online experience. These factors include the lack of connectivity infrastructure or barriers to accessing mobile devices, the absence of quality relevant content in local languages, and poor digital literacy, skills, and capacities. Additionally, online violence poses significant risks, particularly affecting women, girls, children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, Indigenous Peoples, and those in vulnerable situations.	UN, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology and International Telecommunications Union, <i>Achieving universal and meaningful digital connectivity. Setting a baseline and targets for 2030</i> , 2022 GDC, objective 1, paragraph 13(c) WSIS+10 Resolution, paragraph 7
Paragraph 35	The WSIS+20 Review should be cognisant of the need to continue to address digital divides through taking measures toward the achievement of meaningful connectivity, ensuring promotion of community-centred connectivity initiatives and tracking progress	WSIS Action Lines 1, 14 etc. UN GA A/RES/70/125,

	periodically with measurable metrics. Such measures include periodic assessments of transparency and utilisation of Universal Service Funds, facilitation of public-private partnerships, multi-stakeholder cooperation, national and regional broadband strategies, efficient allocation of the radio frequency spectrum, infrastructure-sharing models, community-based approaches, public access facilities and expansion of digital public infrastructure and digital public goods.	paragraph 29
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The multistakeholder model and the role of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

The zero draft should endorse a multistakeholder approach to Internet governance and explicitly acknowledge all stakeholder groups: governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders.

The zero draft should refer to the original definition of Internet governance as stated in paragraph 34 of the WSIS Tunis Agenda: *“A working definition of Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.”* The zero draft should ground multistakeholder participation in the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines agreed at NetMundial+10.

It should recognise that the mandate of the IGF needs to be renewed and made permanent with adequate and dedicated funding. It should include a recognition of the role of the national and regional IGFs as well as make explicit calls for them to be strengthened. The continued existence and stability of the IGF is crucial for its future as a multistakeholder platform which bridges stakeholder communities and regions and connects different Internet and digital policy processes, such as the implementation of the GDC and the continuation of WSIS, amongst others. To strengthen the IGF, particular attention should be paid to the need to encourage broader participation from stakeholders from the Global Majority, including landlocked developing countries and small islands developing States and middle-income countries, as well as countries in situations of conflict, post-conflict countries and countries affected by natural disasters.

Table with language proposals on the Elements Paper

Paragraph 12	Partnership and cooperation between governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders is needed to build an inclusive Information Society and achieve an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for all. This cooperation should be grounded in the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines agreed at NetMundial+10.	WSIS+10 Resolution A/RES/70/125, paragraph 3 São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines GDC, paragraphs 6 and 27 UN HRC A/HRC/RES/32/13
Paragraph 59	<p>We reaffirm that Internet governance should continue to follow the provisions set forth in the outcomes of the summits held in Geneva and Tunis. We recognize that the management of the Internet as a global facility includes multilateral, transparent, democratic and multi-stakeholder processes, with the full involvement of Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with their respective roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>In this manner, we take note of the NETmundial+10 conference hosted by the Government of Brazil and the Multistakeholder Statement on "Strengthening Internet Governance and Digital Policy Processes".</p>	WSIS+10 Resolution A/RES/70/125, paragraphs 8 and 57 NetMundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement
Paragraph 60	We reaffirm the importance of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as the primary multi-stakeholder platform for discussion of Internet governance issues. We acknowledge the importance of its intersessional work and connections with local, national and regional initiatives (NRIs). The WSIS review should update the IGF mandate in order to make it permanent, sustainable, increase participation by governments and other stakeholders from developing countries, and include the forum as an integral part of the GDC follow-up and review process.	NetMundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement GDC, paragraphs 28 and 29
Paragraph 61	Broader participation and engagement in Internet governance discussions by governments and other stakeholders from the Global Majority is critical, particularly from	WSIS+10 Resolution A/RES/70/125, paragraph

	<p>African countries, landlocked developing countries and small islands developing States and middle-income countries, as well as countries in situations of conflict, post-conflict countries and countries affected by natural disasters. Member states and relevant stakeholders should support the participation of governments and all other stakeholders from developing countries in the Forum itself, as well as in the preparatory meetings.</p>	<p>61</p> <p>GDC, paragraph 8(b)</p>
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Interaction of the WSIS with other Internet-related public policy processes

The zero draft should include a clear path forward of how the GDC will be integrated within the WSIS framework. The proposal by Switzerland to develop a joint implementation roadmap and to establish a multistakeholder advisory body to support UNGIS in their work to implement the GDC and the WSIS should be supported.

Table with language proposals on the Elements Paper

New paragraph	Requests UNGIS to develop a joint implementation roadmap to be presented at the CSTD 29th session, to integrate the implementation of commitments into the WSIS framework, to be based on the “WSIS Process and 2030 Agenda - GDC Matrix” developed by UNGIS, ensuring digital cooperation that avoids duplication, maximises resource efficiency and guarantees meaningful multistakeholder participation.
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Process recommendations

We recommend that the following elements be incorporated into the process going forward:

1. **Consultations with governments and non-governmental stakeholders:** Future consultations should bring together governments, industry, civil society, the technical and academic communities, and other stakeholders.
2. **Incorporation of existing regional work and perspectives:** The zero draft should recognise, and incorporate where relevant, work that has been done on the WSIS+20 process at the regional level. Examples include the [Dar es Salaam Declaration](#) and the [Contonou Declaration](#) which emerged from processes led by the UN Economic Commission of Africa (UNECA). The Declarations highlight relevant priorities for Africa as well as contextualised targets and metrics. Civil society organisations have been undertaking significant efforts at the national level to raise awareness, build capacity, and undertake research into national priorities for the WSIS+20 review process. These inputs can be found [here](#). The co-facilitators may support these efforts by attending and incorporating the outcomes of dedicated national and regional consultations into the review process as well as by leveraging existing mechanisms to engage stakeholders at the regional level.
3. **Continued implementation of the Five-Point Plan and Eight Practical Recommendations:** The WSIS+20 review process should continue to implement the recommendations developed by a cross-stakeholder community and articulated in the [Five-Point Plan](#) and [Eight Practical Recommendations](#) to help drive an open, transparent and meaningfully inclusive review process.
4. **Integration of non-governmental experts into national delegations:** Governments should aim to incorporate non-governmental stakeholders within their national delegations to ensure continuous participation of stakeholders throughout the review process and beyond any formal consultation opportunities.