A Joint Letter from APAC Youth Leaders on the WSIS+20 Zero Draft

Prepared by NetMission.Asia

30 September 2025

Dear Co-Facilitators of the WSIS+20 Review process,

1. We, the undersigned youth leaders from the Asia Pacific (APAC) region, sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the WSIS+20 Zero Draft. **Asia is experiencing the largest Internet growth globally**—driven by rapid digital transformation, technological advancements, increasing digital infrastructure investments, and a large youth population now coming online.

2. Facilitated by NetMission.Asia,[1] this joint letter is the result of more than 120 written comments received from 26 youth leaders across 18 economies in the APAC region during a community consultation period held from 3–15 September 2025, as well as a 2.5-hour live discussion and editing session with 17 youth on 24 September 2025.[2] This process reflects the strong interest and commitment of young people in the region to contribute meaningfully to Internet Governance and the WSIS+20 Review process.

3. It is encouraging to see the **acknowledgement of youth** in the Preamble and the decision to make the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) a permanent forum of the United Nations. However, we urge meaningful change in several areas to ensure that the critical perspective of youth is represented in global digital governance.

Recognizing Youth as a Distinct Stakeholder Group Beyond Beneficiaries

4. We support the recognition of the importance of inclusive and broader multistakeholder participation. However, we urge that this recognition be explicitly extended to youth in (105) and (120) given the insufficiency on youth recognition. WSIS+20 Review is a pivotal moment to integrate youth leadership structurally as co-creators to ensure a sustainable and inclusive multistakeholder model, and to enable the next generation to participate meaningfully in decision-making at all levels. Without deliberate, meaningful inclusion, youth perspectives risk being treated as secondary or optional rather than integral to the governance of "our" digital future.

5. Youth are more than beneficiaries, we are active contributors. The work of Youth IGF initiatives and the contributions of young people over the past decade demonstrate the value of an inclusive,[3,4,5] bottom-up multistakeholder environment like the IGF. It is encouraging to see the work of 170+ National and Regional IGFs were applauded in (113) and the commitment to reinforce the intersessional work and support national and regional initiatives in (117) and (118).

6. However, it is disheartening to see the lack of explicit recognition and commitment to support sub-regional and Youth IGF initiatives across (113, 117-118) in the Zero Draft. The use of terminology such as "national and regional initiatives" in (117) obscures the unique efforts of all "NRIs" (which, according to the IGF website, stands for "National, Sub-Regional, Regional, and Youth IGF initiatives"). This risks perpetuating the false impression and reinforcing misperception that sub-regional and youth contributions are not recognized in IGF history.[6]

- ◆ We urge an immediate adjustment of (113, 117–118) and related instances in the Zero Draft to explicitly recognize the work and commitment to reinforce and support all "NRIs" through an acronym or terminology that is inclusive of "National, Sub-Regional, Regional, and Youth IGF initiatives".
- ◆ We request that youth be explicitly recognized as a distinct stakeholder group in (3), (105) and in all instances where stakeholder groups are enumerated to describe ongoing multi-stakeholder participation and meaningful representation.
- ◆ We call for the creation of leadership pathways by encouraging governments to include next-generation leaders in their delegations to key digital governance fora and by establishing a Youth Council to support WSIS Action Line facilitators, the WSIS Forum, the IGF, and other related multistakeholder initiatives.[7]

Closing the digital divide with gender, linguistic & cultural diversity

7. The digital divide remains a pressing challenge for youth in our region. Unequal access to affordable devices, connectivity, and education, as highlighted in (12), (18), (28), continues to limit our ability to fully benefit from social and economic development and civic participation. This is further compounded by risks such as job displacement from emerging technologies like generative artificial intelligence (AI), the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and insufficient efforts in digital literacy education.

8. We support the goal of (32) to connect the unconnected and improve the quality and affordability of connectivity, and we welcome commitments to ensure women and girls have equal opportunities in the digital society (13, 92). However, inclusive participation of equity-deserving groups, particularly from women, girls, and individuals of diverse religions and sexual orientations, as well as the importance of diverse linguistic accessibility through Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) and Universal Acceptance (UA) need to be emphasized prominently in bridging the gap in the digital divide. Access to the Internet in more languages enables a larger number of non-English speaking stakeholders worldwide to connect to the digital society.

9. While it is encouraging to see global progress in Internet access in (21), it fails to capture the reality of the persistent digital divide between urban and rural or remote communities, especially in Pacific Island nations and conflict zones. Overlooking the reality of the digital divide in (31) risks leaving people vulnerable to misinformation, exploitation, and social marginalization due to an unrecognized digital literacy gap.

- ◆ We urge revision of (21) to include gaps in Internet access between urban and rural or remote areas, especially in Pacific Island nations and conflict zones, to capture both progress and persisting inequalities.
- ◆ We urge extending (11) and (18) to include linguistic accessibility through IDNs and UA as essential to linguistic diversity, inclusivity, and cultural participation online.
- ◆ We urge broadening the framing of capacity-building in (31) to also acknowledge the risks of digital exclusion, such as vulnerability to misinformation, exploitation, and marginalization, and highlight the need for targeted digital literacy initiatives.

Building Responsible Innovation and Equity for Future Generations

10. We welcome the Zero Draft's recognition of barriers faced by developing nations in (5) and commitments to children and youth in (14), alongside efforts to leverage digital technologies for environmental sustainability and energy efficiency in (50–54). However, the draft falls short in explicitly addressing the challenges the next generation faces, including climate-related existential threats and financial, technical, and institutional constraints that limit youth participation in governance and innovation. Collaboration with all stakeholders in established Internet Governance forums is critical to advance a sustainable digital infrastructure and economy for a development-oriented and human-centric future.

11. Environmental impacts from growing energy consumption, e-waste, and unsustainable digital infrastructure disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, especially youth in Pacific Island Nations and rural or remote areas. Rapid AI development, concentrated in a few countries, risks amplifying global inequalities, sidelining even non-English languages (both widely spoken and non-dominant), and Indigenous knowledge. Explicit youth inclusion, combined with extending the AI research initiatives in (100) to empower youth perspectives and participation in responsible innovation, could foster more people-centered, equitable, sustainable, and inclusive technologies, environmental management, and governance systems.

   ◆ We urge the acknowledgement of youth as next-generation leaders facing systemic barriers alongside other marginalized groups in participating in digital governance in (5).
   ◆ We urge that youth-focused capacity building be included and opportunities expanded for youth to engage in monitoring, research, and advocacy on sustainable digital practices.
   ◆ We urge the recognition of independent environmental impact assessment framework(s), such as the EcoInternet Index (EII), and committing to optimize Internet and digital infrastructure for energy efficiency.[8]

Footnotes

1. NetMission.Asia is a network of passionate young changemakers committed to engaging and empowering youth in Internet governance, with the goal of enhancing youth mobility and driving impact across the Asia-Pacific.
2. These activities formed part of NetMission.Asia's initiative to engage APAC Youth in contributing to the WSIS+20 process. Volunteers from NetMission.Asia lead the drafting process of the written submission for Zero Draft, including a live discussion and editing session on September 24, 2025. For more information, please visit http://nma.asia/apac-youth-wsis-20.
3. Tjahja, Nadia & Potjomkina, Diana (2024). *An agent of change: Youth meta-participation at the internet governance forum.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2024.102758.
4. Salomão Takahashi, Diego (2025). *Getting a Seat at the Adults' Table: How can Multistakeholder Organizations Shape the Influence of Youth in International Governance?.* https://studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/4250236.
5. Piccolo, Veronica & Novaes, Juliana (2023), *Quo Vadis, Youth? - II° edition of the Youth Atlas.* https://drive.google.com/file/d/19ijZr0YFEwZ5FHxYvzqeVNRnbR4maj_D/view.
6. Internet Governance Forum (n.d.). *Frequently Asked Questions about the NRIs.* https://intgovforum.org/en/content/frequently-asked-questions-about-the-nris.
7. Cramer, Dana (2025). *The Distinct Youth Stakeholder: An ICANN Youth Advisory Committee Concept Notes.* https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ESEG7el10pH8h3GDwAxwbCwBJs0cESMW/.
8. Eco-Internet Index (2023). *Measuring the Eco-Friendliness of Our Internet Infrastructure.* https://www.ajitora.asia/eco-internet-index-2023#:~:text=The%20EcoInternet%20Index%20(EII)%20Framework,Internet%20infrastructure%20on%20climate%20change.

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