



## **CELE submission to the Co-Facilitators of the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) process to the Zero Draft**

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The following document contains CELE's contribution to the call for inputs issued by the Co-Facilitators of the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) process.

The Center for Studies on Freedom of Expression (CELE)<sup>1</sup> is an academic legal research center. CELE conducts research on cutting-edge issues affecting the development of freedom of expression and access to information. Our work encompasses local, regional, global, and comparative studies on both state and private conduct impacting these rights.

### **Introduction**

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the WSIS+20 process and to have our submission considered in the improvement of the current draft, which already represents a solid effort toward building a “people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented information society”<sup>2</sup> in the years to come.

We recognize the effort made by the Co-Facilitators in addressing a wide range of issues in the Draft—many of them highlighted by the academic community and civil society organizations, particularly those from Global Majority countries—as critical for building a future in which information technologies truly enable “individuals, communities, and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, in line

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<sup>1</sup> More information at <https://www.palermo.edu/cele/#>

<sup>2</sup> International Telecommunication Union (ITU), “Declaration of Principles (WSIS, Geneva, 2003),” WSIS Documents, ITU, accessed September 23, 2025, <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>

with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and with full respect for and commitment to upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Human Rights Framework**

We welcome the strong commitment to the universality, indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, as stated in paragraph 78, and to the framework of rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We commend the emphasis on the need to protect online the same rights that people enjoy offline, as stated in paragraph 79.

## **Freedom of Expression**

We especially applaud the explicit commitment to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as stated in paragraph 85, regarding everyone’s right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers.

## **Other Positive Aspects**

We also welcome the references to everyone’s right to privacy, as stated in paragraph 86, and the concern regarding surveillance technologies and their implementation by governments. We note with appreciation the recognition of the barriers faced by developing nations in participating fully in global digital governance and policy-making processes due to financial, technical, and institutional constraints, as stated in paragraph 5. We applaud the reaffirmation of the value and principles of multi-stakeholder cooperation and engagement. We commend the decision to establish the Internet Governance Forum as a permanent UN forum (paragraph 115) and welcome the references to digital public goods and digital public infrastructure. Overall, this is a very strong document, with a firm commitment to human rights as established in the international system

## **Recommendations**

Having considered the above, we recommend:

1. Change the title of the subsection on Human Rights

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations, “Resolution A/RES/70/125: Information and communications technologies for development,” PDF (New York: United Nations General Assembly, 2015), accessed September 23, 2025, [https://publicadministration.un.org/wis10/Portals/5/A\\_RES\\_70\\_125-EN.pdf](https://publicadministration.un.org/wis10/Portals/5/A_RES_70_125-EN.pdf)

Currently, the title reads “Human Rights and Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society.” The reference to an “ethical dimension” is unfortunate, as ethics does not provide a clear framework for grounding governance decisions. While human rights have a solid basis in international law, explicitly recognized in paragraph 78 of the Draft, ethical principles lack legal enforceability and may be interpreted subjectively. The current wording of the title could be used to undermine the document’s strong commitment to the international human rights framework.

In Resolution A/RES/70/125, which reflects the outcomes of the previous review process of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+10), the title heading the subsection on human rights is “Human Rights in the Information Society.” This wording is more accurate and consistent with the content of the present document.

## **2. Remove references to the concept of ‘Information Integrity’**

In the current draft, ‘Information Integrity’ is mentioned twice, in paragraphs 91 and 97, as something of value that could be negatively impacted by digital technologies.

However, the term is imprecise and lacks a clear legal basis in international law. Moreover, ‘Information Integrity’ can be interpreted in ways that conflict with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as referenced in paragraph 85 of the Draft, and its inclusion may introduce ambiguity and weaken the document’s alignment with the established human rights framework.