

Thank you, Your Excellencies, colleagues, I'm Laura Becana Ball, Advocacy and Policy Manager at the [Global Forum for Media Development](#), a global network of more than 200 media development and journalism support organisations working to protect and strengthen journalism as a public good.

This statement summarises 3 key points from our [written input to the Elements paper](#), focusing on what we hope to see reflected in the Zero Draft and outcome document.

First, echoing the statement by the [Global Digital Rights Coalition for WSIS](#), [whose submission we've fully endorsed](#), we want to re-stress that the text should be firmly anchored in international human rights law by reaffirming the **obligations of states to respect, protect and fulfil human rights**, and in particular, clarify that any limitation on freedom of expression must meet criteria of legality, necessity, and proportionality. It should also reference the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the **private sector's role and responsibility to respect human rights**.

Secondly, the text should explicitly recognise that **independent journalism and public interest media are essential to a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented information society, and that they are key to ensuring access to relevant, timely, local, multilingual, and fact-based information.**

**This is not a niche issue:** the way the internet is governed **directly affects the survival of independent journalism, and with it, the public's access to reliable information and their meaningful democratic participation.**

Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved in environments where access to reliable, independent information is suppressed, or where media systems are weak and unprotected.

**Therefore, strengthening journalism's independence and sustainability must be a key priority** — *supported with safeguards against online harassment and sustained funding, among others.* **Otherwise, the production and availability of reliable, independent, and fact-based information online will continue to decline.**

Fulfilling the **commitments to support and protect media and journalists in their vital role**, made in the Pact for the Future or in the recently adopted Sevilla Commitment, **requires robust, human rights-based digital governance frameworks.**

Thirdly, the text should **reinforce the multistakeholder governance model across all digital policy processes.**

This includes a joint implementation of the Global Digital Compact commitments into the WSIS framework, guided by the Sao Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines, and

institutionalisation of the IGF as a permanent structure with adequate, dedicated, and sustained funding.

We urge you to carry these recommendations, which you can find in more detail in our written input, into the Zero Draft and we remain available for any support you may need in the next steps of the process.

**Thank you for your time and consideration.**