

WSIS+20 Virtual Stakeholder Consultations, June 10, 2025

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Enhancing Multistakeholder Cooperation: More Dialogue is needed in the WSIS+20 Process

I thank the two co-facilitators for their roadmap. Now we do have a clear timetable with milestones. It is good to see that the intergovernmental negotiations process is embedded into many multistakeholder consultations. However, I see a problem that both the roadmap and the modalities resolution are unclear about the interaction between the intergovernmental negotiations and the multistakeholder consultations. There is a risk that we end up with two parallel processes.

The design of the first round of governmental consultations last week in New York and the virtual consultations yesterday and today feed the fear, that the whole consultations process will be organized as a monologue, a collection of statements by governments and non-governmental stakeholders. This would be bad. What we need is a dialogue, interaction, where non-state actors can comment directly to governmental statements and governments can react to proposals, made by non-state actors. We need a space where both sides can ask questions and can express agreements and disagreements, to find out where the „rough consensus“ could be at the end of the day, which is December 17, 2025.

It is good that the first steps have been open, transparent and inclusive. But the next step has to create an opportunity for real interaction among all stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental. According to the „Tunis Agenda“, governments are a stakeholder and should be part of the multistakeholder consultations. And non-state actors should have an opportunity to follow the intergovernmental negotiations and have a right to express opinions in a reasonable way, either orally or in writing.

I was listening carefully to the statements made by governments on May, 30, 2025 in New York. Here is where I agree and disagree.

I agree with the statement of the G77 and China that more has to be done to bridge the digital divide and to avoid the emergence of an AI divide. And this is more than to bring the remaining two billion people online. It means investment in infrastructure and education, it means the development of an data economy and the building of AI factories in the global south. During the 1st phase of WSIS, the president of Senegal proposed the establishment of an intergovernmental „Digital Solidarity Fund“ to bridge the digital divide. The recommendations of the „Task Force for Financial Mechanisms“, which were discussed at the Tunis Phase of WSIS, were never implemented. In 2005 the big tech empires, which dominate today's digital world, didn't exist. Those tech empires are the beneficiaries of the digital development of the last two decades, which were also enabled through the WSIS framework. I think it is now also their responsibility, to pay back and to contribute to overcome the new divides in the digital world. The proposals made by Abdullah Alswaha, Minister of Communications and Information Technology of Saudi Arabia at the IGF in Riyadh in December 2024 could be a good start for a new approach to enhance digital solidarity.

I also agree with the proposal of the European Union to establish a „Multistakeholder Sounding Board“. Such a multistakeholder group could be helpful to draft elements of the expected outcome document. As we have seen in many other conferences – from NetMundial to the IGF – there is a lot of wisdom and knowledge in each stakeholder group, which can bring extra value. It would be a missed opportunity, if governments would not use this potential.

And I agree also with Switzerland to give UNGIS a greater role in the next WSIS phase. UNGIS includes now nearly every UN organisation. This is very natural, because now every UN organisation has its own digital agenda. To bring the various perspectives together is not only useful, it helps also to avoid duplications and can create synergies. But UNGIS is a network of intergovernmental organisations. As Switzerland has proposed, it would make sense, to give UNGIS a Multistakeholder Advisory Group as a right hand, where experts from the technical community, the private sector and civil society could contribute with additional perspectives.

I also support all proposals to make the IGF a permanent institution with a stable financing mechanism and to use the Sao Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines (SPMGs) from 2024 to promote enhanced cooperation among all stakeholders.

I disagree with the statement of the representative of Iran to make „enhanced cooperation“ a priority in the WSIS+20 negotiations. „Enhanced cooperation“ is coded language. In the Tunis Agenda, it bridged the 2005 controversy between proposals to establish “Intergovernmental Internet Council” or to leave the management of critical Internet resources in the hand of the private sector. Part of the controversy was the special oversight role of the US government over the DNS A-Root Server, managed by ICANN. In 2005, any additions, deletions or modifications of TLD Zone Files in the A-Root Server had to be authorized by the NTIA, which is part of the US Department of Commerce. Some countries did see this special role of the US government as a violation of the UN principle of sovereign equality of states. The Tunis compromise proposed, that the problem should be solved in “a process”. Whether the process should lead to a “Status Quo Plus” (an intergovernmental oversight body) or a “Status Quo Minus” (the removal of the US stewardship role) remained open. This was reflected in Article 68 of the Tunis Agenda, which “recognizes that all governments should have an equal role and responsibility for international Internet governance.” After the IANA transition in 2016, when the US government handed over the oversight of the A-Root Server to the “empowered community” of ICANN, the basic problem around “equal footing” was settled. Each government in ICANN is now on “equal footing.” The US government has just one vote in ICANN’s Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) as all the other 170 GAC members, including Iran. To reopen the debate around the establishment of an intergovernmental oversight body within WSIS+20 would be a waste of time. What is needed is enhancing the cooperation among stakeholders and to include in particular stakeholders from the global south into digital policy development and decision making.

I disagree also with the statement of the Russian Federation which rejected the GDC, expressed some dissatisfaction with the multistakeholder approach and proposed a stronger role of governments. The idea, to move from a „one-stakeholder approach“ to a „multistakeholder approach“ in Internet Governance was the result of a decade of discussions and culminated in the acceptance of the working definition for Internet Governance in the Tunis Agenda by 193 UN member states. To manage the problems in the digital sphere, it needs the involvement of all stakeholders: governments, the technical community, private sector and civil society. Every stakeholder can bring additional knowledge and expertise to the table. This does not remove the special role of governments, but intergovernmental agreements on digital issues are embedded today in a multistakeholder environment. This is reaffirmed in numerous documents on the international level which were also supported by the Russian Federation in the past. One example is the „Deauville Declaration“ from 2011 which recognized, that „the security of networks and services on the Internet is a multi-stakeholder issue. It requires coordination between governments, regional and international organizations, the private sector, civil society.“ This declaration was signed by Dmitri Medwedjew, then the president of Russia.

And I disagree with the statement by the United States which proposed to de-couple the WSIS Action Lines from the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is true, that the SDGs do not have a strong digital profile. This is probably part of the different approaches between New York and Geneva with

regard to digital policy making. When the SDGs substituted the Milenium Developpment Goals (MDGs) in 2015, there was a lot of ignorance in New York with regard to the WSIS Action Lines. However, the reality is, that sustainable development can not be reached by ignoring the digital dimension. Today, each of the 16 SDGs has a digital component. Instead of decoupling SDGs and WSIS Aaction Lines, it would be better to think about a convergence and to move towards drafting „Digital Development Goals“ (DDGs).