

## **APC's reflections on the 2023 Internet Governance Forum and suggestions for 2024**

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is a network of member organisations that advocate for people to use and shape the internet and digital technologies to create a just and sustainable world.

We extend our most sincere recognition and gratitude to the Government of Japan for their dedicated and careful planning and the overall excellent execution of this Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which allowed us, as different actors from all over the world, to be present at the event. The venue was excellent, the rooms were spacious and the impeccable logistics made the event enjoyable and effective.

We value the opportunity to share feedback on the overall execution of the IGF for onsite participation and pre-IGF preparations.

## **IGF 2023 logistics (website, mobile app, schedule, registration, access to and use of online platform, bilateral meeting system, security, etc.)**

While preparing for our participation and upon arrival, we found the IGF online schedule difficult to read and to navigate. The way the agenda was designed was not user-friendly and this affected its accessibility. As areas of opportunity we kindly ask, for future iterations, for links to be integrated in all formats of the schedule and for the links to work properly, in the most efficient and fastest way possible.

Additionally, as the IGF began, we noticed with concern that access to some domains for participants connecting via Wi-Fi through the official network provided for the IGF 2023 was blocked and remained blocked until the end of the IGF. The unreachable domains included the URL of Amnesty International's website and the URL of APC's #TheIGFWeWant campaign about the value of the IGF, which we launched at the 2023 edition of the IGF. This raises questions about which domains were blocked and on what basis, and about limitations to access to content during a process that is aimed at discussing how to ensure a free, secure and open internet.

## **IGF 2023 sessions**

In terms of workshops and main sessions, participating meaningfully remains a challenge due to timing clashes between them. We believe that this had an impact on participation and on the possibility of using the inputs from workshops in the conversations that main sessions aimed to incorporate. We also noticed that some sessions were not necessarily contributing to deepening the analysis of issues. We are concerned about the predominance of techno-solutionist approaches in sessions related to the persistent digital exclusion in the global South, for example. The focus on techno-solutionism distracts attention and takes the discussion away from the commitments needed to address the disparities in access and the structural conditions needed to challenge the status quo. Additionally, in terms of representation, we are also concerned that several sessions, for example, the workshop “Digital Me: Being Youth, women and/or gender-diverse online” and the workshop of the Dynamic Coalition on Gender on “Disability, Gender and Digital Self-Determination” failed to represent the diversity of the voices that were

speaking. At these two sessions, the people of colour, gender-diverse people, youth and people with disabilities who spoke were mostly participating online. During the sessions, some of them shared the difficulties that made it impossible for them to be onsite. The main two reasons were related to visa applications and travel support.

In terms of the shaping of a digital future, it is positive and encouraging that the IGF 2023 in Kyoto was taken as an opportunity to set the stage for engaging with various processes, particularly the Global Digital Compact and the WSIS+20 review process. We welcomed the formal launching by the CSTD of the open consultation on the WSIS+20 review, as well as the ITU efforts to bring the different stakeholders together to provide updates on the preparations for the upcoming WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event and to invite all stakeholders to participate in the process. We expect the IGF and the IGF community to be playing a key role in building synergies in the lead-up to the WSIS+20 review and the Summit of the Future.

As we have emphasised in our #TheIGFWeWant campaign, the IGF remains at the heart of the internet governance ecosystem. There is no equivalent space for enabling public participation, shared learning, monitoring of progress in achieving inclusive, human rights-based, people-centred internet and digital governance, and discussing the positive and negative impacts of the internet and internet policies in a multidisciplinary and multistakeholder setting.

## **Situation with visas**

Before the event took place and while participants were carrying out travel preparations, we received many reports, especially from members of our community in African countries, of Japanese embassies extending repeated, multiple requests for extensive documentation related to financial and employment proof. For instance, in Uganda, where the APC team worked to support the visa applications of its members and partners, the Japanese embassy refused to provide any reasons for the denial of visas for at least 10 persons applying to attend the IGF, and in some cases asked applicants to prove the legitimacy of the documentation submitted in order to process their visa. All actors and stakeholders who are part of the internet governance ecosystem, particularly governments, have a role to play in ensuring that people from different countries and with different passports are able to cross borders safely and with dignity. Restrictive and discriminatory travel

policies and practices prevent in-person engagement in key decision-making, deliberation and discussion spaces. They stifle the voices of those most affected and exclude them from physical convenings, networking, advocacy and other opportunities, and from having a say in the definition of agendas that impact on the configuration of the digital present and future.

At the same time, we appreciate and recognise the response of the IGF Secretariat and MAG members who assisted in every possible way as soon as this issue was brought up to them.

## **Suggested improvements for the IGF 2024**

The Internet Governance Forum must reverse the decision to make Saudi Arabia its next host. We explain the reasons in an [open letter to the UN Secretary-General](#).

An online IGF is an alternative to consider.

## **Closing comments**

We want to express once more our deep and sincere gratitude to the Japanese Government, the United Nations, the IGF Secretariat, civil society organisations, governments, academia, the private sector and representatives from the technical community for the success of the IGF 2023.