IGF 2017 Reporting Template

- Session Title: From 'Fake News' to Internet Shutdowns: A Look at World Trends in Freedom of Expression Online

- Date: Thursday, 21 December 2017

- Time: 10:20 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.

- Session Organizer: Rachel Pollack Ichou, UNESCO

- Chair/Moderator: Rachel Pollack Ichou, UNESCO

- Rapporteur/Notetaker: Chris Buckridge, RIPE NCC

- List of Speakers and their institutional affiliations:

- Anna Karefelt, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

- Guilherme Canela Godoi, UNESCO

- Florence Poznanski, Internet sans frontières

- Cláudio Lucena, Paraíba State University

- Peter Micek, Access Now

- Bishakha Datta, Point of View

- Thomas Schneider, Swiss Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM)

- Key Issues raised:

- Monitoring of trends in freedom of expression and media development, both off-line and online, helps us see the bigger picture, identify challenges and form strategies.

- The dramatic increase in internet shutdowns hinders freedom of expression and threatens an open, human rights-based internet, affecting not only journalists, but all individuals in their ability to access information.

- Automation (e.g., in social media feeds) leads to trade-offs in user-experience.

- The credibility of journalists is being attacked, and the capacity of individuals to receive information produced by journalists is under attack.

- Platforms are engaging in the production of as well as the dissemination of news and information, and they are failing to protect vulnerable users, including women journalists.

- The spread of new laws and regulations, as well as extra-legal measure to encourage or coerce platforms, has resulted in over censorship.

- The Internet is a space where people who are traditionally considered marginalized or have less power or less privilege are able to speak and to amplify their voices.

- Online violence and harassment takes away freedom of expression by privileging one person's expression over another's.

- The Council of Europe has produced a number of soft law standards and guidance on issues such as the protection of journalists, internet freedom, and the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries.

- It is important to include a representative of internet platforms in future sessions.

- If there were presentations during the session, please provide a 1-paragraph summary for each presentation:

Guilherme Canela presented the key findings of the *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2017/2018*. He explained that the report offers input to UNESCO's Member States to identify trends and support policy discussions related to media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists. Mr Canela highlighted the explosion in freedom of information laws, while noting, however, growing legal restrictions and internet shutdowns. Regarding media independence, notable trends include an increase in self-regulatory efforts by internet intermediaries, as well as growing dependence on subsidies. The safety of journalists remains a pressing challenge; 530 journalists were killed between 2012 and 2016, and nine out of 10 killings of journalists go unpunished. Although the availability of content has exploded, gender inequalities in the media persist. He concluded by noting the opportunities presented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly related to the role of free media for the achieve of Goal 16, as well as all other Sustainable Development Goals.

- Discussions that took place during the workshop session:

The workshop featured a broad discussion based around the recent UNESCO publication *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2017/2018*. The report itself is structured around four areas: media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists, and the discussion reflected this, covering a spectrum of issues relevant to freedom of expression online.

Internet shutdowns was one key topic, discussed as having broad impacts, social and economic. Participants noted that it can be difficult even to arrive at a common definition of Internet shutdowns, and that there are multiple layers of responsibility across both the public and private sectors.

Social media was another major theme of the session, with discussion of the major changes wrought both by the technologies involved, which have allowed users to become content producers and blurred the lines that define the term "journalist", and by the attempt to respond to this, which has resulted in cases of over-censorship and the apparent delegation of "policing"

responsibilities to internet companies. Some speakers said that national legal systems should be improved to take back this responsibility from the private sector.

- Participant suggestions regarding the way forward/ potential next steps /key takeaways:

- In 2019, the SDG16 will be the key topic being discussed at the UN High Level Political Forum in New York. The internet governance community could offer important elements to Member States and to that discussion.

- The *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2017/2018* can be used to spark discussions and organize national debates.

- Protections of journalists should cover all those producing journalism, including new media actors. Online harassment and violence, increasingly directed against women journalists, must be addressed by governments, platforms, internet users and media.

Gender Reporting

- Estimate the overall number of the participants present at the session: 116 (based on Sched)

- Estimate the overall number of women present at the session: 60

- To what extent did the session discuss gender equality and/or women's empowerment?

Very much / gender responsive

- If the session addressed issues related to gender equality and/or women's empowerment, please provide a brief summary of the discussion:

The session featured a rich discussion of challenges to achieving gender equality online, particularly related to gender-based online harassment and abuse that has actively diminished women's freedom of expression. Speakers cited studies and examples from several countries indicating that women have often restricted their own Internet activity due to threats and harassment online.