



## **WHAT IS THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM (IGF)?**

Internet governance was one of the most controversial issues at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and at the subsequent WSIS+10 review by the General Assembly in the wake of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Cognizant of the fact that any Internet governance approach should be inclusive and responsive, the WSIS mandated the Secretary-General of the United Nations to convene the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) for multistakeholder policy dialogue.

As a platform for discussions, the IGF brings various people and stakeholder groups to the table as equals to exchange information and share good policies and practices relating to the Internet and technologies. While the IGF may not have decision-making mandates, it informs and inspires those who do. It facilitates common understandings and knowledge exchange of how to maximize Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges.

The IGF also gives stakeholders from all countries, including developing countries, the opportunity to engage in the debate on Internet governance and it contributes to capacity building, allowing these stakeholders to build knowledge and skills that will facilitate their participation in existing Internet governance institutions and arrangements. Ultimately the involvement of all stakeholders, from developed as well as developing countries, from governments to international organisations, from the private sector to the civil society, is necessary for advancing dynamic public policies in Internet governance.

## **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

The IGF has over the years identified a wide range of issues to be addressed by the international community and has shaped policy decisions related to the Internet and technologies throughout the world. The IGF does not adopt resolutions or create any binding treaties. Its importance lies in its unique ability to facilitate discourse between governments, intergovernmental organisations, private companies, the technical community and civil society organisations that deal with or are interested in Internet governance related public policy issues. IGF gatherings discuss proposed responses including regulatory frameworks, potential risks, global trends, as well as best and worst practices that have been adopted or are currently under discussion. Participants also examine the impact of treaties, recommendations and other documents adopted in various international venues within the Internet governance ecosystem.

The IGF serves as a laboratory, a neutral space, where all actors can table an issue without concern that a decision may be taken against their interest. As an open forum, rather than a membership forum, the IGF is for all people with a stake in the Internet. It was established in 2006 and has since gained global prominence among stakeholders as an open, inclusive, and transparent forum for dialogue and collaboration. The IGF was renewed for a second time during the WSIS+10 review for another 10 years (2016-2025).

Key issues discussed at the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the IGF in 2017 include:

The impact of modern technologies on industry and the economy;

- Multistakeholderism and Multilateralism and the setting of global norms;
- The new digital economy & sustainable development -- providing opportunities or deepening divides?
- The role of government in policy making in the digital age;
- The emergence of a global, Internet society;
- Cybersecurity and cyber-threats;
- Artificial intelligence (AI);
- Critical Internet resources;
- Blockchains and bitcoins;
- Fake news;
- Access, inclusion and diversity;
- The pressing need for security in the Internet of Things;
- Digital divides;

Full programme of 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of IGF is available here: <https://igf2017.sched.com/>

## **WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS?**

Some significant impacts of the IGF are:

- Improved understanding and agreement on Internet governance and new technologies
- Enhanced cooperation and collaboration among key organizations and stakeholders dealing with different Internet governance and technology issues
- Increased opportunity to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet
- Strengthened capacities of all countries especially, developing countries and their stakeholders, to participate effectively in Internet governance arrangements
- Increased multilingualism and multiculturalism on the Internet
- Mapped multistakeholder and multilateral efforts on public policies issues related to the Internet

In 2017, outputs of the IGF include the comprehensive “Policy Options for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billions” (CENB) reports, now in its third phase; CENB in particular has garnered more than 100 contributions across its three phases and includes inputs from various stakeholders. Community-driven intersessional activities such as CENB and Best Practice Forums (BPFs) have offered additional complementary platforms for multistakeholder dialogue on topical Internet policy issues such as Cybersecurity, Gender and Access, and Local Content, among others.



The 17 Dynamic Coalitions of the IGF stand as an example of its successful efforts toward having a continuous, expert, multistakeholder discussions on various issues pertaining to the Internet governance. Issues taken up by the dynamic coalitions include innovative approaches to connecting the unconnected, IoT, network neutrality, platform responsibility, blockchain technologies, community connectivity, core Internet values, gender and Internet governance.

More than 100 countries and regions have established firm IGF processes for their respective communities. A high level of enthusiasm, activities in addition to a sheer number of National, Regional and Youth IGFs (NRIs) are testaments to the success of the IGF's multistakeholder model. By increasing the IGF Secretariat's linkages with the NRIs, the IGF has also benefited tremendously through a bottom-up approach on issues pertaining to Internet governance and technologies. These important collaborations between the IGF and the NRIs are showcasing how Internet related issues are different across countries and regions, implying that a relevant change can only be made if we all work together through an open and inclusive process.

#### **WHO CONVENES THE IGF?**

Every year, the UN Secretary-General appoints the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) - a group of experts and practitioners representing all stakeholder groups - to advise on the programme and schedule of the annual meetings of IGF. The MAG comprises of 50-55 Members from governments, the private sector, civil society, academic and technical communities, from all five UN regional groups. The MAG holds meetings throughout the year to review the progress of the IGF and to substantively plan the IGF annual meetings. Each year the MAG is renewed by 1/3 through a decision of the Secretary-General, following a nomination process from the IGF stakeholders.

Secretariat support to the IGF and its MAG is provided by the IGF Secretariat that resides at the UN Office in Geneva. The Secretariat is financed through voluntary contributions. Substantive and administrative support to the IGF Secretariat is provided by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).

#### **WHO HOSTS THE IGF?**

The host countries for the past 12 meetings of the IGF are:

- 2006: Athens, Greece;
- 2007: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil;
- 2008: Hyderabad, India;
- 2009: Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt;
- 2010: Vilnius, Lithuania;
- 2011: Nairobi, Kenya;
- 2012: Baku, Azerbaijan;
- 2013: Bali, Indonesia;
- 2014: Istanbul, Turkey;



- 2015: João Pessoa, Brazil;
- 2016: Jalisco, Mexico;
- 2017: Geneva, Switzerland.

Like any other UN meeting, a host country agreement is signed between the UN (administered through UNDESA) and the host country. If the meeting is held at a UN duty station in the host country, a simpler Memorandum of Understanding is used.

### **WHO PARTICIPATES AT THE IGF?**

The IGF welcomes organisations and individuals from diverse relevant expertise and geographical areas around the world. The meeting is open to all World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) accredited entities, as well as other institutions and individuals with proven expertise and experience in matters related to Internet Governance, for example, the CEO of ICANN, Mr. Göran Marby, the President of Internet Society, Ms. Kathryn Brown, the President of Microsoft, Brad Smith (online; video message) and Mr. Vint Cerf, Chief Internet Evangelist of Google of “Fathers of Internet”.

### **12<sup>TH</sup> IGF**

The 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the IGF in Geneva was a huge success. With the overarching theme of ‘Shape Your Digital Future!’, more than 2000 onsite delegates from 142 countries participated in a total of 260 sessions at the IGF, with thousands more stakeholders engaged online through real-time transcription and web conferencing.

The President of the Switzerland opened the Forum and hosted an interactive high-level roundtable discussion among ministers, heads of organisations and representatives from the private sector and civil society.

A record number of scheduled Open Forums was seen in 2017, as session formats traditionally reserved for Governments and IGOs. Organizers of these Open Forums (45) include Governments of Afghanistan, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Egypt, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Latvia, Lebanon, Mexico, the Netherlands, Paraguay and the United States, as well as the IGOs among which are: UN Women, OHCHR, UNESCO, UNCTAD, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the African Union, Council of Europe, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Organization of American States, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Representing the private sector are companies like Amazon, AT&T, CISCO, Comcast, Deutsche Telekom AG, European Broadcasting Union, Facebook, Gartner, Google, GSMA, ICC BASIS, Microsoft, Orange, PwC, Sify Technologies, Telefonica, Walt Disney, Twitter and Yahoo. The CEO of Microsoft delivered a video message.

Full list of participants is available online: <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/igf-2017->

[onsite-participants](#)

## WHAT IS ITS MANDATE?

The mandate of the IGF are set out in paragraphs 72 to 80 of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (the Tunis Agenda):

“We ask the UN Secretary-General, in an open and inclusive process, to convene, by the second quarter of 2006, a meeting of the new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue—called the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). The mandate of the Forum is to:

- Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet;
- Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body;
- Interface with appropriate inter-governmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview;
- Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities;
- Advise all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world;
- Strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries;
- Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations;
- Contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise;
- Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes;
- Discuss, inter alia, issues relating to critical Internet resources;
- Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users;
- Publish its proceedings

At the WSIS+10 review in 2015, UN Member States “acknowledge the role of the Internet Governance Forum as a multi-stakeholder platform for discussion of Internet governance issues. We support the recommendations in the report of the Working Group on Improvements to the Internet Governance Forum of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, 10 which the General Assembly took note of in its resolution 68/198 of 20 December 2013, and we call for their accelerated implementation. We extend for another 10 years the existing mandate of the Internet Governance Forum as set out in paragraphs 72 to 78 of the Tunis Agenda. We recognize that during that period, the Forum should continue to show progress on working modalities and the participation of relevant stakeholders from developing countries. We call upon the Commission, within its regular reporting, to give due consideration to fulfilment of the recommendations in the report of its Working Group”.