

# Center for Democracy & Technology comments on IGF Istanbul and the future of the IGF

## IGF Istanbul

A number of successes distinguished IGF Istanbul from other IGFs. These include, inter alia, the launch of a new funding mechanism to support the IGF; endorsement by stakeholders of a major declaration on African Internet rights and freedoms; the return of Best Practices in a new and policy-shaping format; and stakeholder agreement on a recommendation that was forwarded to the Human Rights Council on privacy in the digital age. These achievements are indicative of the continuing value that the IGF brings to Internet governance and point to the very real need for the IGF mandate to be renewed.

IGF Istanbul also provided an excellent opportunity for civil society to come together and explore issues of common interest. CDT joined others in the BestBits platform in producing a sign-on statement that supported the continuation of the IGF, called for stakeholders to build on the outcomes of the NETmundial meeting and expressed concern over the “shrinking space for freedom of expression and access to information” in Turkey. Another joint initiative, which was lauded in the IGF closing ceremony, was a letter to the UN Secretary General that sought an open-ended mandate for the IGF – in other words, seeking to ensure the IGF’s future and to remove the burden of fighting for renewal every five years.

CDT believes that the IGF (and national and regional IGFs) continue to grow in importance. While some may disparage its role as a “talk shop”, there is no other environment that allows for fruitful Internet policy discussions without the burdens of negotiated outcomes and political grandstanding.

## Key improvements the IGF needs to implement prior to IGF João Pessoa, Brazil

While we consider IGF Istanbul to have been successful we believe that the IGF can be further strengthened. We outline below a set of improvements that should be implemented during the next 12 months to give the IGF the best possible chance for a renewal of its mandate:

### Empower and leverage the expertise of the MAG

The MAG continues to be an underutilized resource. CDT recommends that the MAG establish a series of working groups dedicated to critical issues such as communications, outreach, intercessional work, best practice forums, etc. Some of the biggest failings of the IGF have little to do with the substantive issue-based discussions that occur at the annual meetings but rather in the supporting work such as communicating both prior to and post the annual meeting, reaching out to and engaging with stakeholders (and particularly developing country

representatives), encouraging stakeholder involvement in IGF programs such as the Best Practice Forums, workshop submission mentoring, and coordinating with and leveraging the learnings from the national and regional IGFs, etc.

Conscientious and dedicated persons have joined the MAG to make the IGF more responsive and relevant and mechanisms for them to be able to do so should be further explored. The IGF secretariat can only do so much and MAG Working Groups would be a useful and credible approach for addressing some of the deficiencies mentioned above.

#### Ensure coherency between the national, regional, and global IGFs

There has been a proliferation of national and regional IGFs, which is a welcome development and a clear acknowledgement of the important role the IGF format plays in the Internet governance and policy ecosystem. Yet apart from the reporting session at the global IGF, there are still few linkages between the work and findings of the national and regional IGFs and the global IGF.

The global IGF needs to incorporate greater recognition of the work that is accomplished at the national and regional IGFs. Policy issues that are raised by national IGFs should feed into the appropriate regional IGFs and, in turn, feed into the global IGF. Part of the process for determining the issue(s) focus and agenda of the global IGF should be based upon the issues that are important at national and regional levels. This will help demonstrate that the global IGF can be responsive to the questions and concerns that are arising in a variety of national and regional contexts.

#### Strengthen the relevance and utility of outputs

IGF must evolve so that both the event *and* the outputs are relevant to policy-shapers and policy-makers. Workshop outputs should specifically outline suggested steps or recommendations for addressing the issues/challenges in question. The workshop reporting template now provides workshop organizers with specific prompts for generating their post-workshop report, which is useful, but the template could be further refined to specifically ask for areas of consensus and dissent. The template should be made available on the workshop submission page and shared with organizers when their workshop proposals are accepted, to better encourage workshop organizers to shape their sessions in a manner that leads to clearly identified conclusions (including identifying persistent points of disagreement among panelists/stakeholder groups from the panel).

Concise, solutions-oriented approaches and recommendations would be extremely valuable to policy makers and advocates as they engage in other fora and policy development processes, and would demonstrate that the outputs of the IGF can be useful beyond the IGF itself.

#### Structure the workshop tracks

Particular attention should be paid to improving the way discussion tracks proceed throughout the IGF and feed into roundtables. Recognizing that it is difficult to complete a thorough report on a session during the IGF itself, workshop/panel organizers should still be encouraged to identify a set of preliminary findings from their sessions to feed into the culminating roundtables. These roundtables should be moderated with a view to identifying common topics that arose across panels in the same discussion track and bringing together the learning and points of consensus and disagreement, so that there is coherency in approach to a particular issue area.

#### Find a BIG, current and challenging issue as the main theme

IGF Istanbul was a relatively low-key but smoothly functioning event. We welcomed the IANA transition and ICANN accountability discussions – these were excellent examples of the IGF addressing relevant and current issues.

We encourage the IGF to further focus on pressing and challenging issues. There should be both willingness to include sessions that address challenging topics on the formal agenda, and the flexibility to encourage discussion of challenging issues as they relate to other topics. (To a certain extent, the emphasis on participatory sessions that include interventions from the audience helps to ensure this happens, but a more overt focus on a particularly pressing issue would guide session organizers to consider how their topic is related to the over-arching theme.) The IGF must continue to embrace and encourage open and frank discussion of the real challenges facing Internet-related policy, development and governance. The IGF community should consider whether a day dedicated to such an issue would be a useful evolution of the traditional agenda.

The theme of the IGF tends to be characterized by (and created from) a string of “governance” words – words such as building, connecting, bridging– resulting in a title that is typically anodyne. The IGF should – whether in its overarching theme or its workshops – highlight thorny issues and challenge participants to explore solutions and ways forward.

#### Revisit the sub-themes

The sub-themes leave something to be desired and consume an inordinate amount of time to agree. The selection for IGF Istanbul was a backwards looking negotiated exercise where we had to agree the inclusion of critical Internet resources (an issue that has been endlessly debated) in order to get human rights on the agenda. The Secretariat and the MAG should agree a set of sub-themes for organizing purposes that will carry from IGF to IGF: better that the global community knows what the sub-themes are and be solicited for their view on key questions and substantive issues that the next IGF should be addressing within those themes.

#### Encourage issue continuity from IGF to IGF (through intercessional work and other means)

The IGF should encourage organizers of successful workshops to submit follow-up proposals for the next IGF. For example, workshops that have highlighted issues that are new and/or attract significant participation, etc., should be encouraged to submit an updated workshop proposal so that developments, new research, and policy changes since the last IGF can be reviewed, discussed, and new consensus points identified. In recognition of a continuing need to improve the diversity of participants and perspectives represented on panels, workshop organizers should be encouraged invite new speakers to appear on the subsequent panels.

CDT supports the suggestion in the IGF Chair's Summary that intercessional work is critical to continuing the discussion and debate on key issues. Intercessional work also allows interested parties to follow- and engage in – current and pressing issues as they evolve, providing a real opportunity to debate and shape the discussion. It provides a useful continuity between the annual IGFs and intercessional issues should also be discussed at national and regional IGFs.

### Promote Best Practices

IGF Istanbul re-introduced the concept of Best Practice Forums. While the reports of the sessions have yet (as of the writing of this submission) to be published, the format and the open, working platform documents hold great promise. The Best Practice Forums are ideal candidates for intercessional work: each of the five issues have been identified as key to stakeholders. This said, the importance of engaging in the best Practice platforms for each issue needs to be far better communicated by the IGF, the MAG and/or the issue owners – the level of discussion to date on the five issue area platforms is far from adequate.

### Give a real voice to local activists

The IGF needs to be more creative and proactive in giving local activists in the host country a greater voice. This was a serious deficiency in IGF Istanbul, given that the IGF workshops that did focus directly on human rights lacked a specific focus on the situation in Turkey, and only one panel that focused on Turkey was accepted to the formal agenda. This deficiency must be rectified at the next IGF – the Internet policy and governance regime of the host country should not be “off limits”.

Poor workshop scoring is also an inexcusable rationale for not highlighting the views and concerns of local Internet and human rights activists. The IGF MAG should be ready to mentor the proponents of workshop submissions that highlight the work of and challenges facing local activists.

### Why the IGF is important and why we need mandate renewal

The scope – and clearly interconnected nature – of issues discussed at the IGF encourages participants to step back and look at the broader Internet governance landscape and its evolution. The IGF is a critical component of the Internet ecosystem and Internet governance, as was highlighted at NETmundial. Precisely because it is not constrained to producing

negotiated outcome documents, IGF provides participants the opportunity to interact and exchange opinions, information, and ideas about solutions to the most pressing Internet policy issues of the day.

The IGF also provides an excellent opportunity for civil society organizations (and other stakeholders) to meet, strategize, and identify issues where there might be common purpose and a desire to work together. For example, the number of new participants who attended the meeting of the BestBits civil society platform in Istanbul was encouraging and civil society activists and advocates were able to spend valuable time learning from and coordinating with each other.

We are facing a challenging 12 months or so. The WSIS+10 review that will occur at the end of 2015 culminates in an intergovernmental “summit” that will decide the future of the IGF and will certainly feature governments trying to reassert their primacy in Internet governance matters at the international level. A successful IGF in Brazil (as well as a ground-swell of support for the IGF’s continuation) will be critical to seeing the continued evolution of the open Internet and the participatory Internet governance ecosystem.