

# GNI Releases 2011 Annual Report

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## Further Reading

The Global Network Initiative (GNI) released its 2011 Annual Report today at an event in Stockholm. The report offers a look at GNI's recent work, its nine new members, and the second phase of its company assessment process.

The past year has been a busy one for GNI. Two new companies, Evoca and Websense, have joined the founding three companies – Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo! – as participants. GNI has also welcomed seven other new members, NGOs and investors that are based in such far-flung locations as India, Buenos Aires, and Sweden. By bringing their commitments and perspectives to the Initiative, these members strengthen its capacity to protect and promote users' free expression and privacy rights by influencing corporate practices and government policies.

On the ground, GNI has been engaging in honest dialogue around some of the most challenging human rights questions facing companies in the ICT sector – discussions that have begun to inform company actions. By creating a trusted space for such “shared learning,” GNI facilitates the exchange of knowledge and ideas, both of which are foundational to the development of socially responsible corporate practices.

GNI also exists as a forum for a unique type of global, multi-stakeholder collaboration and advocacy. Governments around the world are stepping up their efforts to [regulate](#) [2] the Internet – through both [increased](#) [3] [surveillance](#) [4] of users and ever-more vigilant [censorship](#) [5] of online speech. And they often turn to domestic and global companies for help, creating both financial and ethical burdens for these companies. As a voice that raises reasoned, informed concerns about the impacts of such laws – on free expression, privacy, and the innovation that enables the exercise of these rights – GNI is becoming an increasingly valuable and knowledgeable participant in policy discussions worldwide.

Of course, the 2011 Annual Report also offers a look at Phase II of GNI's first company assessments. The assessments complement GNI's shared learning processes and public policy efforts by checking in on member companies to see that they don't just talk the talk, but walk the walk. In Phase II, independent assessors investigated whether the three founding companies had implemented the types of systems, policies, and procedures necessary to support full implementation of GNI's Principles. Phase III, which will begin late this year, will involve assessments of how the Principles are being applied to real-world cases.

The Phase II assessments demonstrated that, in line with their commitments to GNI, Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo! each conduct human rights impact assessments to identify and develop responses to situations where free expression and privacy may be at risk, have processes in place to review government requests that implicate these fundamental rights, offer staff training on GNI-relevant issues, and have ensured that these issues receive oversight from senior levels of the companies. The types of recommendations that emerged from the process include: companies more pro-actively update and document their human right impact assessment processes, engage more directly with human rights experts and other stakeholders as they conduct risk assessments, and apply a risk-based approach to the review of the work of those vendors whose contracts were established before GNI was formed.

The assessment process was a good first step and, for members of the ICT sector, an unprecedented one. But we also learned some important lessons in the process – for example, about how to make sure companies, assessors, and board members are on the same page about the types of practices

that need to be discussed and documented and how to ensure that the assessment process remains rigorous but also respects companies' obligations to keep certain information confidential for legal or other reasons. Those of us involved in GNI look forward to applying those lessons to the next phase of assessments.

GNI has a long road ahead: there is absolutely more work to be done both by member companies and by the organization itself. For example, GNI will be best positioned to continue making real, lasting change if its membership expands and if new companies make accountable commitments to the Principles and to broader engagement with GNI members and GNI issues. As we look toward the rest of 2012 and beyond, I am excited to work with current - and future - GNI members to continue building this unique Initiative and to help it reach its full potential.

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