

WCIT Watch, Day 1: WCIT Opened to Public; Foundational Fights to Come

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During the first day of the ITU's World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT), being held in Dubai, leaders of government delegations decided to open the conference's plenary sessions to the public. We hope this move will increase opportunities for advocates and experts to observe and participate in key discussions over the next two weeks of this conference that could affect the Internet.

The lack of transparency and openness in the WCIT process has been a central concern for civil society advocates following the treaty conference. While it is heartening to hear from CDT's expert on the ground, Matthew Shears, that the public will be permitted to enter the conference venue, we are disappointed to see that a formal announcement of this decision has not yet appeared on the ITU's website.

Members of the public will also be permitted to attend the meetings of Committee 5, where substantive proposals to amend the treaty (called the International Telecommunication Regulations, or "ITRs") will be under review. Committee 5 will divide into two working groups focused on the various treaty articles, but it is not clear whether or how the public will be able to watch or participate in those.

Foundational Fights

Having achieved as much transparency as we're likely to get, focus is now turning to the nitty-gritty of the treaty itself. First up is a foundational debate over who the ITRs apply to: the current group of administrations and "recognized operating agencies" – ITRs-speak that the U.S. has taken to mean licensed telecom operators offering international telephony services to the public – or a much broader collection of "operating agencies" that could include private networks, data centers, cloud services, and government agencies' own internal networks. Making this shift would greatly expand the scope of the treaty and change its present and future implications. No surprise, this question saw extensive debate without resolution today, and delegation leaders will meet tomorrow morning to continue the quest for consensus.

From now until the conference closes on December 14, we're sure to see debates over [cybersecurity language](#) [2], [interconnection regimes](#) [3], net neutrality and quality of service, network shutdowns, and mobile roaming. To follow the plenary sessions in real time or view archived video, visit the ITU's [webcast](#) [4], and check back here for updates.‰

Matthew Shears in Dubai for CDT contributed to this report.

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