

Civil Society Open Letter Highlights Barriers to WCIT Participation

December 9, 2012

Further Reading

Today, civil society advocates participating in the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) delivered a joint statement of concern about the lack of opportunity for full participation in the WCIT process by independent civil society actors.

In a [letter](#) [1] addressed to the ITU Secretary General Hamadoun Touré, advocates identified three urgent matters:

- the lack of any official standing to the public comments solicited prior to WCIT at the ITU's invitation;
- the lack of access to and transparency of working groups, particularly the working groups of Committee 5;
- and the absence of mechanisms to encourage independent civil society participation.

CDT is proud to endorse this statement. For months, we have called attention to the fundamental flaws in the ITU process, noting its closed, non-transparent nature and the limited degree to which civil society can participate in the proceedings. Indeed, each and every option for involvement that the ITU has offered to civil society comes with significant barriers to legitimate, equitable participation.

The letter commends those Member States delegations that have actively invited civil society representatives to join their member delegations, but also notes that these individuals are "first and foremost members of their delegations and have limited opportunities to express an independent civil society view." In short, these participants' views will only be heard at the conference if their governments' choose to adopt them. It is also important to acknowledge that not all states have done this, and some have explicitly denied advocates a seat at the table.

The ITU has often responded to these critiques by noting that civil society groups can purchase membership in the ITU and attend independently. Yet as we've mentioned before, the cost of joining the ITU and attending the WCIT (in Dubai, one of the world's most expensive cities) is prohibitive for the vast majority of civil society organizations in both developing and wealthy countries alike, leaving many advocates no option for live participation at all. And even those who have obtained the funds to travel to Dubai with no affiliation face considerable barriers to entering key meetings of working groups at the conference.

The letter goes on to note that individuals who could not attend the conference were given the option of submitting comments for public view – but we know that these have not been archived in the official online database for the conference. As the letter reads:

[D]elegates appear entirely unaware of these comments, and the diligent work of civil society organizations that accepted the ITU's invitation to participate through the public comment process is in danger of being lost. From a practical standpoint, the possible help these public comments could provide in resolving some of the contentious issues before the WCIT is wasted.

Despite these barriers, civil society in Dubai and around the world have made every effort to make

their voices heard in the WCIT process and to take advantage of conference [webcasts](#) [2] and document releases that have taken place. We hope that delegates and the Secretariat recognize that these activities have been undertaken in an earnest effort to contribute meaningfully to the treaty revisions and to promote policy development processes that are open, participatory, and above all protective of human rights.

On a final note, we wish to emphasize that the ITU website has been critical to participation for those who are involved with the conference remotely. The attacks that caused the ITU website to go down last week have only hampered the efforts of remote participants. CDT agrees with the civil society [statement](#) [3] released Friday condemning these attacks - they serve no purpose but to reduce transparency and interfere with participation by those outside of the Dubai.

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- [WCIT](#)
- [ITU](#)

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[1] https://www.cdt.org/files/pdfs/20121209_CS_ITU_ltr.pdf

[2] <http://www.itu.int/en/wcit-12/Pages/webcast.aspx>

[3] <http://www.twitlonger.com/show/k8vqj0>