Civil Society Wraps up WTPF with a Unified Voice

May 17, 2013

At the close of the World Telecommunications Policy Forum (WTPF), Matthew Shears, director of CDT's Project on Global Internet Policy and Human Rights, delivered a statement on behalf of a coalition of civil society members and organizations from around the world. Hailing from six continents, these members of civil society participated in the WTPF both in person and remotely, bringing critically important perspectives as governments gathered to debate a range of Internet governance issues. (For more on the WTPF, see this post [1].)

The statement recognized the ITU for taking a small but important step in opening up the preparatory sessions of the Informal Expert Group (IEG) to non-member stakeholders. The six opinions that were forwarded to the WTPF from the IEG and adopted with minimal changes were the agreed product of multistakeholder discussions within the IEG.

The statement emphasizes the crucial need for discussions of the role of governments in Internet governance to occur with the equal participation of both government and non-government stakeholders. Human rights advocates, technical experts, academics, and industry all have deep insights into the operation and functioning of the Internet and into the implications of governance and policy decisions. Whatever role governments may have in Internet governance, it will have an impact on non-governmental stakeholders, and all of the interested parties must be involved in any process to define this scope.

It also notes that, while the ITU took some steps to make the WTPF process more open, many stakeholders, including civil society and governments, were left unsure as to exactly how they could maximize their involvement in these deliberations. Barriers to participation can take the form of resource and funding constraints, lack of clarity over opportunities to make official contributions to discussions, as well as procedural barriers that prevent some classes of stakeholders from engaging directly in decision-making. The ITU must continue to work to address these serious barriers.

Finally, the statement calls for any forum where this conversation – or any policy-development process – takes place to be open and transparent in its proceedings, and to actively promote full and equal participation by all stakeholders.

The statement is available here [2]; the full text appears below.

16 May 2013
Geneva, Switzerland
World Telecommunication Policy Forum

My name is Matthew Shears. I am an IEG member and I am speaking on behalf of my IEG colleagues:

- Nnenna Nwakanma
- Avri Doria
- Deborah Brown
- Wolfgang Kleinwachter

I am also speaking on behalf of the following civil society organisations and individuals:

- Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
- Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT)
- Center for Technology and Society (CTS/FGV), Brasil
- Consumers International

- Internet Democracy Project, India
- Global Partners and Associates
- Access
- William Drake, International Fellow and Lecturer, University of Zurich and NCUC Chair

Many civil society organisations are here in the room and participating remotely: They have traveled from Brazil, Ecuador, India, Malaysia, the USA, Germany, and the United Kingdom, and are listening in via the webcast from around the globe, including Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, and Australia. Some of the organisations represented here are ECOSOC accredited and yet, as observers, unfortunately their representatives are unable to take the floor and address the distinguished delegates.

We would like to commend the ITU for steps taken to show more openness and inclusiveness in the WTPF process through the IEG. We would note that the multistakeholder nature of the IEG meetings and the willingness of all stakeholders to work together, were, we believe, instrumental in bringing about the credible texts that were forwarded to the WTPF.

At the same time, we do agree with many governments that the modalities of participation and contribution in the IEG and WTPF were not clear. Had these modalities been clearer we could have anticipated more participation from all stakeholders around the world and could have obviated some of the concerns expressed yesterday.

We have commented extensively on issues related to the participation of all stakeholder groups at the ITU and refer you to the statement from the Best Bits civil society coalition (to which there are almost 40 civil society signatories from all regions), and to our comments in Information Document 6. We ask that the ITU make the Best Bits statement, which was provided to the ITU on the first day of the meeting, available as an information document of the meeting.

As to the opinions themselves, we are satisfied with the six drafts that were forwarded from the IEG and just adopted. Although not perfect, these opinions are important texts that should help facilitate key development and governance goals. We look forward to working with other stakeholders in implementing these opinions going forward.

With regard to the role of stakeholders in the multistakeholder model, we value and appreciate the discussion that was held in the Forum yesterday and today.

We thought that the clarifying comments and amendments from Brazil to their earlier proposal were a commendable articulation of the opportunity and challenge that governments face: first, how to appropriately engage in the multistakeholder governance model and second, how to ensure that there are mechanisms to facilitate such engagement. We are very sympathetic because we in civil society face some of the same challenges. And we trust that civil society, and all other stakeholders, will be afforded the opportunity to continue to participate fully in these discussions, wherever they are held. Of course, we not only support the further engagement of governments on Internet governance within the multistakeholder framework – we support the further engagement of all stakeholders. Civil society face very significant resource challenges when participating in meetings such as this. Yet, we are here because we believe these meetings are important and, crucially, that participating as an equal stakeholder in these discussions is our responsibility.

To exercise these responsibilities we must have transparency, openness and inclusivity in policy processes. As such we call not only on the ITU but on all governments and organisations to ensure that their respective policy processes at the national, regional, and international levels are open, inclusive, transparent and that the mechanisms by which stakeholders can participate in a full and equal manner are well communicated. This would contribute significantly to furthering the engagement of all stakeholders, including governments, in the multistakeholder model.

We would note that just as governments need enhanced cooperation from organizations and other stakeholders engaged in Internet governance, non-governmental actors need similar enhanced cooperation from governments, the ITU and other intergovernmental organizations. Enhanced cooperation is a two way street.

Finally, we appreciate the leadership of the Chair for WG3 in guiding us through the discussion on how governments engage with the multistakeholder model. We need to have this discussion on a regular basis, not just for governments but for all stakeholders, and we need to use all available fora to do so. We are equal stakeholders in this process and while we may not always agree, it is our responsibility to find common ground and ways forward together.

Our thanks to the Secretary General, to the Chairs for their excellent work and to all distinguished participants.

Copyright © 2013 Center for Democracy & Technology
The content on this website is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License. Text from CDT can be freely copied and used as long as you make no substantive changes and clearly give us credit. Details.
Source URL: https://cdt.org/blogs/1705civil-society-wraps-wtpf-unified-voice

Links:
[1] https://www.cdt.org/blogs/emma-llanso/1705wtpf-successful-outcome-many-questions-remain
[2] https://docs.google.com/a/accessnow.org/document/d/1FZr-9sN_OOWDfs6fwHfYZi49RcK5V9Y04lNeRekeybg/edit?pli=1