

WTPF: Successful Outcome, but Many Questions Remain

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Governments from around the world gathered in Geneva over the past few days to debate a range of Internet governance and policy issues, including the meta question of the role of governments in Internet governance. Perhaps the biggest question going into the conference was whether the governments could deliberate and reach consensus after the [divisive outcome of the WCIT](#) [2]. Tensions were high after the WCIT, but the WTPF revealed that governments are still able to come together and have a relatively direct exchange of views on challenging issues.

The tone of discussion was markedly different from the WCIT to the WTPF. Many governments were amenable to discussing topics that would have been entirely off the table at WCIT. For example, some of the most impassioned defense of the multistakeholder model came from the delegate from Iran, who, in his closing statement, cited the highly [valuable](#) [3] [contributions](#) [4] from RIPE NCC and the other Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) and pointed to the benefits of discussing these matters with expert stakeholders in the room. Many governments spoke favorably of multistakeholder processes. Of course, the proof of this broad embrace of participatory policy development and decision-making must be borne out at the national level, and governments having a long way to go. But it is still remarkable that so many governments are on record as acknowledging the benefits of the multistakeholder approach.

In terms of outcomes, the WTPF adopted six non-binding opinions on a range of topics that included the role of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) in increasing connectivity in developing countries, the IPv6 transition, and supporting multistakeholderism in Internet governance. (The final report and opinions from the WTPF are available [here](#) [5].) These opinions had been developed through the Informal Experts Group (IEG) process, which brought together ITU Members and non-member experts to debate these topics in three meetings over the previous year. Member States adopted the six opinions forwarded by the IEG with minimal changes.

The opinions were dispensed with fairly quickly, leaving governments with almost two full days to debate the perennial issue of the role of governments in Internet governance. The debate was wide-ranging, with Russia clearly calling for a single intergovernmental body dispensing top-down international Internet policy, while many governments clearly resisted any move away from the current multistakeholder model.

Much of the debate centered around a proposal made by Brazil to introduce a new opinion on the “role of governments in the multistakeholder model”. The [initial proposal](#) [6], which was based on text that the IEG considered but could not reach consensus on, covered a broad sweep of topics and appeared to champion a significantly greater role for the ITU in Internet governance. In deliberations, Brazil clarified that it intended its proposal to highlight the need for capacity building among government stakeholders, and improved mechanisms for government engagement in Internet governance fora. While Brazil produced a revised draft on Day 3 that more closely tracked these expressed intentions, and while there was a general level of support for continuing discussions on this matter, it was clear that many governments and other stakeholders would have had extensive edits to the draft text and that there would not be sufficient time to develop a consensus draft.

Instead, they resolved to continue the conversation elsewhere, with many governments promoting the Internet Governance Forum, among others, as a prime place to take up the topic with the input of many different stakeholders. Some governments pushed back on the idea of using IGF as a discussion forum, because IGF does not produce official outcome documents.

Many took note of the [Commission on Science and Technology Development \(CSTD\) Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation](#) [7], a recently constituted effort to examine the progress on “enhanced

cooperation” on Internet governance as outlined in the [Tunis Agenda](#) [8]. (“Enhanced cooperation” has been a subject of debate since the drafting of the Tunis Agenda, with some governments arguing it requires the establishment of a new intergovernmental process to facilitate government cooperation on Internet governance issues, while others argue that enhanced cooperation is an ongoing process that does and should occur in every venue where Internet governance and policy is deliberated.) The CSTD working group has been developed with a view toward geographically balanced [multistakeholder inclusion](#) [9], with representatives from civil society, industry, and the technical/academic community each receiving five seats on the WG. The WG is still dominated by governments, both through the 22 government seats and the seats for international intergovernmental organizations.

The Chair of the session proposed moving the discussion to the ITU’s [Council Working Group on international Internet-related public policy](#) [10] (CWG-Internet). Because the CWG-Internet is one of the most closed bodies of the ITU, permitting only Member States (and not even Sector Members) to participate, this proposal immediately raised concern. The United States and Sweden were among several governments who intervened to call for the CWG to be opened to all stakeholders to participate in this debate. (Indeed, Sweden proposed opening the CWG last year. Link unavailable due to ITU password restrictions on access to Council documents.) The forum closed with Dr. Hamadoun Touré, Secretary-General of the ITU, promising to urge the Council to open CWG-Internet to participation by all stakeholders. We hope the Council heeds the many voices calling for more openness and transparency in this venue.

Finally, a range of civil society members and organizations, including CDT, joined together in a final statement to the WTPF emphasizing the need for all future conversations on these important topics to include full and equal participation from all stakeholders. More information about the statement is available [here](#) [11].

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