

WHAT IS THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM ?

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) serves to bring people together from various stakeholder groups as equals, in discussions on public policy issues relating to the Internet. While there is no negotiated outcome, the IGF informs and inspires those with policy-making power in both the public and private sectors. At their annual meeting delegates discuss, exchange information and share good practices with each other. The IGF facilitates a common understanding of how to maximize Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges that arise.

The IGF is also a space that gives developing countries the same opportunity as wealthier nations to engage in the debate on Internet governance and to facilitate their participation in existing institutions and arrangements. Ultimately, the involvement of all stakeholders, from developed as well as developing countries, is necessary for the future development of the Internet.

UN Connection

More than 60 years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Negotiators then could not possibly have imagined many decades later that there would be a new invention, the Internet; yet, it seems that they had the Internet in mind when they drafted Article 19:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

This Article encapsulates the very essence of the Internet and its borderless nature. The Internet is seen as providing a “crucial ... international platform.” The IGF serves as a laboratory, a neutral space, where all actors can table an issue. The IGF provides a space for dialogue where interested actors can take up an issue without concern that a decision may be taken against their interests.

The Internet Governance Forum is an open forum which has no members. It was established by the World Summit on the Information Society in 2006. Since then, it has become the leading global multi-stakeholder forum on public policy issues related to Internet governance.

Its UN mandate gives it convening power and the authority to serve as a neutral space for all actors on an equal footing. As a space for dialogue it can identify issues to be addressed by the international community and shape decisions that will be taken in other forums. The IGF can thereby be useful in shaping the international agenda and in preparing the ground for negotiations and decision-making in other institutions. The IGF has no power of redistribution, and yet it has the power of recognition - the power to identify key issues.

A small Secretariat was set up in Geneva to support the IGF, and the UN Secretary-General appointed a group of advisers, representing all stakeholder groups, to assist him in convening the IGF. The United Nations General Assembly agreed in December 2010 to extend the IGF’s mandate for another five years. The IGF is financed through voluntary contributions.

For more information: <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/>