

Title: Protecting Human Rights Online: The Freedom Online Coalition Open Forum

The Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) held an Open Forum at the 2015 IGF in João Pessoa. The aim of the Open Forum was to draw attention to the inter-sessional work of the FOC and inform the wider IGF community of the FOC's efforts to promote online freedoms.

The Forum began with an introduction by the moderator and then Frerieke van Bree from the Digital Defenders Partnership, a joint initiative of several FOC members, talked about their work in support of human rights defenders over the year.

The next part of the meeting focused on the substantive work of the three FOC working groups (WG1-An Internet Free and Secure; WG2-Digital Development and Openness; WG3-Privacy and Transparency Online ). Lead representatives from each of the FOC's three working groups (WGs) gave updates on the work to date. Michael Walma, cyber coordinator from the government of Canada set out WG1's progress in developing a rights-based approach to cybersecurity. The working group has now developed a high level normative framework, which was to be presented later in the IGF at a separate workshop. The framework has thirteen recommendations, developed through year-long consultations among WG members and external experts. James Losey, co-chair of WG2 with the government of Sweden set out the plans of the group to look at the application of rule of law principles to internet development. Katharine Kendrick, co-chair of WG3 set out progress on the groups' work, which focuses on the relationship between companies and governments. The group had just completed a major report investigating transparency processes in government requests to ICT companies for user information and content restriction. The report analyses how both actors disclose information about law enforcement and national security requests.

Gigi Alford from the US State Department then explained that the Coalition was undertaking an internal review of its processes, conducted by an external evaluator, former head of the Global Network Initiative Susan Morgan. Susan introduced herself and welcomed comments from participants.

Piret Urb from the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs then spoke about the FOC's diplomatic networks active in Geneva, Paris and New York. Estonia is particularly active in the Geneva network, and Piret reported how the networks provide an avenue for governments to connect who are not always present at big events, and that they are also an opportunity for governments to engage with civil society through network-organized events.

Finally Carla Valverde from Costa Rica (Ministry of Science Technology and Communication), the current Chair of the Coalition, set out plans to host the next FOC conference in Costa Rica. Ricardo Mor Solá the cyber policy lead from the Spanish government attended and spoke of his hope that Spain would be joining the Freedom Online Coalition this year.

The subsequent panel discussion focused on the importance of the Coalition engaging in promoting online freedoms externally more vigorously, the benefits of multi-stakeholder policy development and the challenges of balancing security and human rights.

However it should be noted that the ability to hold an interactive conversation was hindered by the room, which was open to the conference so required all participants to wear a headphone set. Future events would be better located in a room that facilitated better interaction.

---