

16 October 2023

H.E. Ms. Anna Karin Eneström

Co-Facilitator for the Global Digital Compact
Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Chola Milambo

Co-facilitator for the Global Digital Compact
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zambia to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Claver Gatete

Outgoing Co-Facilitator for the Global Digital Compact
Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations

H.E. Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres

Secretary-General of the United Nations

Ref: The United Nations' Internet Governance Forum stands ready to accept the responsibilities arising from the Global Digital Compact periodic multistakeholder review and follow-up

Your Excellencies,

We would like to thank the outgoing Co-Facilitator for the Global Digital Compact (GDC), H.E. Mr. Claver Gatete for his support of the GDC effort. We also congratulate and welcome the incoming Co-Facilitator, H.E. Mr. Chola Milambo, and look forward to working with you.

We have the pleasure of sharing with you a proposal developed by the United Nations' Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) regarding the development of a Global Digital Compact, which you have been entrusted to lead.

The Internet Governance Forum Leadership Panel and Multistakeholder Advisory Group believe that the IGF is ready and best-suited to serve as the venue for periodic multistakeholder review and follow-up to the GDC, as called for in your recent Issues Paper.

We recognise and express our gratitude for your work in initiating the informal consultations on the GDC during the first half of 2023, and for the follow-up Issues Paper that was presented during the United Nations' General Assembly in September.

We strongly agree that the GDC presents a unique opportunity to establish a framework - built upon the UN Charter, Agenda 2030, the UDHR, and the Tunis Agenda - that will ultimately ensure an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital future for all.

The IGF community has already actively contributed to the GDC consultations and thematic deep dives, including the Addis Ababa IGF Messages, which directly addressed the themes

outlined for the GDC. Moreover, the IGF Leadership Panel and the IGF MAG have urged closer integration between the IGF and the GDC, as stated in the letter from 8 June 2023¹:

"We would also highlight that the themes and issues that are to be addressed in the GDC have been discussed and examined in great depth by the IGF community, both at the annual events and in IGF intersessional work. As such, there is a wealth of knowledge and insight that can be drawn upon in development of the compact."

The recent Issues Paper, drawing on the results of your intergovernmental and multistakeholder consultations, underscores the value that a diverse group of actively engaged stakeholders (governments, the Internet technical and academic community, private sector, and civil society) can bring to the global conversation on digital governance and global digital cooperation.

It is vital to note that the meaning of "digital cooperation" - as it has been discussed in the GDC-related work thus far - is essentially coextensive with the broad definition of "Internet governance" that was adopted in the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society in 2005², and is, by extension, congruent with the remit of the IGF.

We also note the broad and future-looking mandate of the IGF, defined in paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda (see Annex), which indicates that the IGF is not simply an annual event but rather an ecosystem - an ecosystem that has steadily evolved and improved over nearly two decades.

The implementation of this mandate has matured over the years, growing with our use of technologies from a narrow focus on governance of Internet technologies governance to a broader digital governance focus. This is seen through the substantive issues covered by IGF, which in recent years have consistently matched the themes now being discussed under the GDC: AI & Emerging Technologies; Avoiding Internet Fragmentation; Cybersecurity, Cybercrime and Online Safety; Data Governance and Trust; Digital Divides and Inclusion; Global Digital Governance and Cooperation; and Human Rights and Freedoms.

The IGF ecosystem includes the global network of national, regional and thematic Internet governance fora (currently more than 100 national IGFs, 23 regional initiatives and 35 youth initiatives), intersessional work carried out by Policy Networks, Best Practice Forums and an extensive network of Dynamic Coalitions, and the vibrant annual IGF meeting. The recent event in Kyoto, Japan, drew a record number of participants, with more than 6,000 experts and decision-makers on-site and more than 9,000 registered.³

This diverse array of structures and processes means that the IGF is well-placed to “keep pace with technological development”, and offers an ecosystem suited to address the need for “regular review and follow-up mechanisms”, as called for in your Issues Paper.

¹ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/263/25690

² "A working definition of Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet." <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>

³ A draft report on the 2023 IGF is available here: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/300/26575

We present below some thoughts on new approaches or activities, all well within the current IGF mandate, that could enable the IGF to serve as a review and follow-up mechanism for the GDC:

- The annual IGF meeting could include a dedicated work track, incorporating workshops, open fora, and main and high-level sessions, focused on review and follow-up on the needs and gaps identified in the GDC.
- UN departments and agencies, as well as other interested stakeholders, can be invited to prepare annual/periodic reports on GDC progress that would be presented within this event track, culminating in a debate on "The State of Global Digital Cooperation", convened by the IGF Leadership Panel, and bringing the UN Secretary-General together with multistakeholder leaders from across the globe.
- The IGF Leadership Panel and MAG can call upon the global network of NRIs to dedicate specific conference tracks to GDC follow-up, as appropriate, and report on these discussions; we can also call upon the community to dedicate IGF intersessional work at the global level to GDC issues.
- A synthesis of the outcomes of relevant intersessional work, the annual IGF, debates and agreements relating to GDC review and follow-up can be summarized in a dedicated section of the annual "IGF Outputs" and communicated to all UN departments and agencies, as well as other stakeholders, for appropriate follow-up actions;

Such evolution is not new to the IGF, which has consistently adapted to the rapidly changing technological and social landscape over the course of its existence; recent years have seen the implementation of several changes (including the establishment of the IGF Leadership Panel) envisaged in the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, with a view to creating an "IGF+". We welcome the opportunity to continue to develop the IGF's vital role in the multistakeholder governance of the global Internet.

We take this moment to reinforce our strong belief that a close collaboration between the Co-facilitators and the Internet Governance Forum will lead to a GDC built upon consensus-based commitments, as well as to a robust and effective follow-up mechanism.

We remain ready to support you in this important endeavor and in your role as Co-facilitators. Likewise, we are at your disposal to provide any clarifications.

Sincerely Yours,

Vint Cerf, Chair, IGF Leadership Panel
Paul Mitchell, 2023 Chair, IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group
Carol Roach, 2024 Chair-elect, IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group

cc:

IGF Leadership Panel

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Annex: Mandate of the United Nations Internet Governance Forum

The mandate of the IGF is detailed in paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (2005):

72. We ask the UN Secretary-General, in an open and inclusive process, to convene, by the second quarter of 2006, a meeting of the new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue—called the *Internet Governance Forum* (IGF). The mandate of the Forum is to:

- a) Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.
- b) Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body.
- c) Interface with appropriate intergovernmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview.
- d) Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities.
- e) Advise all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world.
- f) Strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries.
- g) Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations.
- h) Contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise.
- i) Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes.
- j) Discuss, *inter alia*, issues relating to critical Internet resources.
- k) Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users.
- l) Publish its proceedings.