

6th December 2008, Room 6 – IGF Hyderabad

The Freedom of Expression and the Media Online Dynamic Coalition (FoE DC) was relatively quiet between the 2007 and 2008 IGF meetings. Members of the coalition have been working on their own projects relating to freedom of expression, and sharing outcomes and news items where appropriate.

Taking note of the relatively low level of activity of the coalition in 2008, the initial question asked at the coalition meeting in Hyderabad was whether the coalition should continue to exist, or whether it should merge with the Internet Bill of Rights dynamic coalition. The overwhelming response from meeting participants was that the coalition should continue to operate in its own right. There was general consensus that freedom of expression is a critical internet governance issue and that more needs to be done to address it in the context of the IGF.

Meeting participants agreed to join the coalition mailing list and contribute to discussions regarding how to move the work of the coalition forwards. The mailing list is open for all stakeholders to join at <http://mailman.ipjustice.org/listinfo/expression> .

Leadership

It was agreed that stronger leadership of the coalition is needed. Most of the original coalition founders have either left their posts or shifted the focus of their work away from the IGF, leaving a leadership gap. It was suggested that leadership of the coalition should be multi-stakeholder and doesn't necessarily need to fall on one person. Freedom of expression organisations are notably absent at the moment, and the coalition needs to work on recruiting them to participate.

Role of the coalition and mode of working

The meeting addressed the issue of what role the FoE dynamic coalition should play. One participant suggested that people working on freedom of expression issues had found other platforms to continue their work, leading to low levels of activity within the coalition itself. It was noted that the organisers of the workshop on freedom of expression earlier in the day were absent from the coalition meeting. In order to be successful and attract participation, dynamic coalitions need to be seen as relevant.

It was agreed that the coalition would use the existing mailing list as the primary means of communication for the time being. However, many participants felt that other means of communication should be explored, including blogs. Ongoing coalition activity could take the form of focused discussion around specific issues with a facilitator to guide the process. Participants agreed to further discuss what the precise role of the coalition should be in relation to other FoE initiatives and projects, and how it should work in the future.

Activities at the IGF

It was agreed that the FoE DC should try to secure a meeting slot early on the agenda of the 2009 IGF. Coalition members should plan a structured meeting, and should focus on bringing media and human rights organisations into the discussion. UN human rights bodies also need to be involved.

Issues to work on over the next year

Suggestions made by workshop participants included:

- The coalition should focus on people's real life experiences of violations of free expression. We should look at how we can support those who face direct limitations on FoE.
- The coalition should examine whether there are certain issues that are unique to freedom of expression online and should focus on these. How is content delivery different? What are the technical aspects that we need to concentrate on? Who are the gatekeepers?
- Other participants argued that we should look at both online and offline issues, and the intersection between them.
- The coalition could look at what freedom of expression means in the context of the internet. Should it examine definitions and explore what the limits to free expression are?
- The coalition should look at the issue of linguistic diversity. How can we connect people working on similar issues or facing similar problems who speak different languages?
- Other issues to consider are media concentration, blogging, pro-poor issues, positive dimensions of expression and the public sphere, filtering, security, the role of media entities and user generated content.