



Internet Rights and Principles Dynamic Coalition Meeting Internet Governance Forum, Sharm el Sheikh. 18th November 2009-12-17

The annual meeting of the Internet Rights and Principles (IRP) Dynamic Coalition was held at the 4th Internet Governance Forum in Sharm el Sheikh. Owing to organisational and scheduling issues in the wider Forum, the meeting was rescheduled to the early morning on a day when Forum participants had difficulty clearing security to get into the venue. A number of participants therefore did not make it to the meeting or arrived late. However, despite these issues, the meeting was still relatively well-attended and productive.

The meeting took the form of an informal and open discussion amongst participants. After a short presentation of the history of the coalition and projects undertaken over the course of the year, the discussion focused on the coalition's work to build a Charter of Human Rights and Principles for the Internet.

Brief background to the IRP Coalition and its work

The IRP Coalition was founded in 2009 as a result of a merger between the coalitions for an Internet Bill of Rights and Framework of Principles for the Internet. The aim of the coalition is to promote understanding of how international human rights standards apply in the internet environment, and to provide a coordinating umbrella platform for individuals and groups working on rights and internet governance issues. The coalition has a broad membership of individuals from the civil society, government and business sectors. Members share information and debate issues via the coalition mailing list and work together on collaborative projects. Membership of the coalition has grown throughout 2009, and now has over 130 participants registered on its website, 360 fans on its Facebook page and over 160 people on its mailing list.

The coalition held a mid-term meeting in Geneva in September 2009 which focused on work done by some members to explore the relationship between values, human rights and principles in internet governance. Whilst discussion continued at Sharm el Sheikh as to what exactly the term "principles" means in the context of the coalition's work, there appears to be a growing consensus that the focus should be on "implementation principles"; principles designed to apply human rights standards to specific policy and internet use issues that have arisen with the evolution of the internet. The coalition meeting discussed the nature of the IRP coalition and strategies for its continued work. It was stressed that coalition activities are rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, aiming to build upon it so that human rights are protected and promoted on the internet.

Discussion during the meeting highlighted the need for coordination between the different dynamic coalitions operating in the context of the IGF. A workshop held by coalition members at the 2008 IGF brought the different dynamic coalitions together to discuss how human rights are relevant to their work. Each coalition now has a representative who has agreed to be the liaison person with the IRP coalition. However, more remains to be done to enhance cooperation and coordination, building a united front to push for better consideration of rights issues at the IGF. Coalitions are also being

encouraged to participate in the authoring of relevant sections of the new Charter of Human Rights and Principles for the Internet. Meeting participants commented that dynamic coalitions are open spaces for collaboration and for the initiation of specific projects. The dynamic coalitions dedicated to addressing human rights issues have tended to be dominated by civil society, although there has been growing interest from government and business stakeholders.

Focused discussion on the Charter of Human Rights and Principles for the Internet

Discussion began with a brief background to the rationale and motivation behind this coalition initiative. The project is rooted in the early mission of the former Bill of Rights Dynamic Coalition to create a bill of rights for the internet. Whilst the coalition has been renamed, many of its members are still keen to work on such a bill. The coalition therefore accepted the Association for Progressive Communications' (APC) invitation to participate in a revision of its Internet Rights Charter. The aim is to interpret what international human rights standards mean in the context of the internet, and to identify implementation principles that will help stakeholders to uphold these rights. Implementation principles consider issues at broad "layers" of the internet environment, from infrastructure through to code, applications and content. Workshop participants discussed how the new Charter could be used as a tool for advocacy, and form the basis of a strategic plan for action and platform for multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Progress has already been made in drafting the Charter, using APC's original work as a starting point. IRP coalition members and APC network members have brainstormed ideas and principles in a Wiki. An expert group, led by Meryem Marzouki, Rikke Frank Jørgensen and Wolfgang Benedek, has been formed to review this work and produce an edit that is in line with international human rights standards and that builds on existing agreements and conventions. The wiki remains open for public additions until the end of 2009, at which point the expert group will begin its work. They plan to feed back to the wider coalition in Spring 2010. The expert group is currently looking for human rights experts and practitioners from developing countries to participate in its work, and interested parties are invited to get in touch via the coalition mailing list. Whilst the expert group will produce a "version 1.0" of the Charter, the idea is to produce a living document that can be revised as technologies and contexts continue to evolve. The overarching goal is to produce a practical, multi-dimensional Charter, with hypertext links to relevant case studies and material. As the Charter is a work in progress, stakeholders are currently being invited to endorse the process rather than the document itself.

Meeting participants were generally highly positive about the process of creating the Charter. They commented that the initiative was timely, and that internet governance issues are rarely framed in terms of human rights. Some felt that the Charter shouldn't be restricted to the IGF arena, but exported to the wider internet community. It could be a common reference point for different international policy spaces, and could really influence and inspire change. There was recognition, however, that the project is an ambitious one and will require considerable inputs of time, as well as human rights and technology expertise.

Steering Committee Elections

Following the coalition meeting, elections were held for the creation of a new steering committee with equal participation from the academic, civil society, private and governmental sectors. The results are due to be announced by the end of 2009. Max Senges has announced his intention to step down as Chair of the coalition, and a new Chair will be elected from the new steering committee members.

The coalition is always seeking to expand its membership. All interested stakeholders are invited to join the coalition mailing list at <http://lists.internetrightsandprinciples.org/listinfo.cgi/irp-internetrightsandprinciples.org>, and register on the coalition website, <http://internetrightsandprinciples.org/>.