

UN IGF 2021 Katowice - Open Forum #48 Future of the Internet

Summary of virtual address from Chris Philp, UK Minister for Tech and the Digital Economy:

The Minister emphasised the need for stakeholders to collaborate towards a positive vision for the future of the Internet given challenges and opportunities over the coming decade:

- The Internet must become more inclusive as the digital divide narrows, and prevent any fragmentation of the Internet's underlying architecture that will constrain and undermine connectivity, to the detriment of prosperity and fundamental freedoms.
- The Internet can become faster and more efficient by using emerging technologies, but innovation and deployment of these technologies should not contribute to a more centralised internet, nor give undue influence to a small group of stakeholders.

The Minister presented five UK 'lenses' composing a framework to underpin a positive vision:

- Economic: We want to strive for a pro-prosperity Internet spreading economic growth around the globe. We must harness the digital economy by supporting diverse and competitive markets and encourage responsible and permissionless innovation.
- Security: We have to make sure the Internet architecture is secure and resilient and citizens are protected, for the Internet's operation and to meet public expectations.
- Society: The Internet must support democracy and open society values. Stakeholders should work together to improve accessibility and ensure that all users are able to participate online safely. We must have a pro-development Internet and promote affordable connectivity to the billions globally who still don't have access.
- Governance: We must maintain a globally governed Internet, championing the functioning of balanced and inclusive multi-stakeholder governance processes.
- Technical: We must support a scalable, interoperable and open global Internet, while maintaining of course environmental sustainability, and connectivity for diverse users.

Summary of Panel Discussion between Lise Fuhr (ETNO), Joanna Kulesza (Univ. Lodz), and Anriette Esterhuysen (IGF MAG), chaired by Rhys Bowen (UK DCMS)

On the lenses and core values of a positive vision of the future of the Internet:

- The dependencies and connections between different types of values makes addressing Internet issues complex. Issues are surfaced either in relation to legal aspects, human aspects, and technical aspects of the Internet, but they need to be considered together and balanced.
- Approaches can build on existing norms based order, and frameworks of both security and individual rights.
- Human rights and capacity building complement the core values.
- Economic and societal opportunities must be considered, as well as equality, particularly as connectivity is key to narrowing the digital divide.
- Interoperability is key, as is maintaining the global nature of the Internet as a whole rather than national cyber spaces governed by national law.
- Protecting the public core of infrastructure and the Domain Name System (DNS) is important or else we risk losing the power of the open, global, interoperable Internet and the economic and social benefits it enables.
- The 'publicness' of the internet is vital to the role of the Internet as a platform for innovation and participation in a connected world, and necessitates inclusion.
- We need to take full account of the socio-technical nature of the Internet, and need to recognise what the range of requirements from different use cases of human users, as well as machine to machine interactions, means for infrastructure.

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On the role of Governments in supporting a positive vision for the future of the Internet

- Governments are showing increasing interest in regulation.
- Interventions including policy, regulation, taxation, and antitrust can be necessary but must be delicate and evidence-based so we don't end up with approaches that cause fragmentation, undermining the Internet's interconnectedness or global governance.
- Regulation can change the way market players act on the internet, and stakeholders should be aware of this power and understand its consequences.
- Governments cannot address challenges of the Internet alone and not all problems can be addressed by international law
- Bringing in national and local actors is very important in addressing the access divide, and connecting stakeholders.

On the importance of multistakeholder participation and forums for collaboration

- Internet Governance (IG) is distributed, multidisciplinary, multistakeholder. In some ways IG is becoming more fragmented, as parts of the system struggle to share information or collaborate. Governance can struggle to match pace with innovation.
- There are no easy solutions and the system should be seen holistically, all in cohesion recognising fora as interconnected and interrelated.
- Stakeholders must be conscious of proposals for changes to the Internet, and drive forward incremental change without causing any permanent or irreversible damage.
- Intergovernmental space is important, including for negotiating around human rights and developing international norms.
- Regional spaces are important to align regulation, and ensure collaboration between initiatives and stakeholders to avoid creating more barriers.
- Industry has a key role and responsibility to engage with self-regulation and co-regulation, as well as to drive standards setting.
- Technical governance is for industry to lead, but still should be multistakeholder. Some technical institutions - Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), and Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) - follow discussions in IG processes and fora, but we need their participation.
- Internet access can be further enabled through soft skills: for example the work of Global Forum for Cyber Expertise (GFCE), and within ICANN, representing end users and governments and working to help local communities.
- There are barriers to engaging in IG discussions today, including due to the technical nature and jargon. We need a sense of inclusion that can address these barriers.
- If we want to reinforce the multistakeholder model we need to get the right people in the room, and recognise it won't always be the same people and participation has shifted over the years.
- Industry participation in IG has evolved over the last decade. Big Internet companies are sending less people to IGF, but sending more people to Washington DC.
- The presence of Governments has increased over the past decade, with many positive examples of governments becoming invested in the multistakeholder model.
- IGF is important in the distributed IG ecosystem, as a space for communities to come together and engage with complexity. The multistakeholder community needs to dig deeper than just easy areas of consensus work through our differences, using IG processes as an opportunity to hash out complex issues.

Overall Takeaways

- A positive vision for the future of the Internet has to draw together the strands of core values across technical principles, human rights, access and openness, as well as economic considerations. The future of the Internet needs to enable inclusion of the unconnected, and flexibility for a range of uses.
- While vital, the multistakeholder ecosystem experiences some challenges including the number and complexity of governance and technical forums and the speed of governance processes compared with technical developments.
- The multistakeholder governance ecosystem, as well as multistakeholder technical fora must be reinforced, and made more inclusive and joined-up, to tackle complex Internet issues in a way that reflects the perspectives of all, and to ultimately uphold a positive vision for the future of the Internet.