

Town Hall on Internet Fragmentation:

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R2P Grassroots “Digital Alliance Treaties”: *Make Fragmentation Less Convenient*

A seminar on the need for robust civil society & international collaborative action in the fight against internet fragmentation.

Introduction

The global community faces increasing challenges related to internet fragmentation, including internet shutdowns, digital censorship, and restrictions on digital rights. The sharp rise in authoritarian internet shutdowns poses a significant threat to innocent people’s ability to have their voices heard in the face of brutal oppression. Additionally, there is a lack of actionable mechanisms for oppressed communities to call upon for the protection of their right to advocate for themselves. This reality perpetuates a persistent state of inaction by major countries and global organizations. Tragically, “out of sight out of mind” becomes the diplomatic procedural norm.

To address these pressing issues and foster collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, we propose a town hall that calls for further collaboration on the concept of “Digital Alliance Treaties.”

This town hall aims to explore the potential of these treaties, facilitate knowledge exchange, and encourage collective action to protect digital rights, preserve the openness of the internet, combat internet fragmentation, and ensure the protection of human rights.

By bringing together diverse participants, this town hall aims to generate actionable strategies and foster ongoing collaboration in this critical area by introducing the idea of establishing **Digital Alliance Treaties** that go beyond traditional notions of **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** and encompass the protection of individuals’ right to have their voice on the global stage. This proposal outlines the structure and objectives of these treaties.

Objectives of Digital Alliance Treaties

The primary goal of a Digital Alliance Treaty is to create mutual responsibility among participating entities, be they countries, regions, or civil organizations, to protect and promote the right of individuals and communities to have their voices heard in the face of oppression. The treaties should embody the following objectives:

1. **Digital Rights Protection:** Prioritize the safeguarding of fundamental digital rights, including freedom of expression, access to information, and the right to participate in global discussions, irrespective of borders or political boundaries.
2. **Global Advocacy:** Facilitate active advocacy on behalf of either party in the event of internet shutdowns or other forms of digital censorship, ensuring that their voices are amplified and their perspectives represented on the global stage.
3. **Collaborative Response:** Establish protocols for collaborative responses to instances of internet shutdowns, combining diplomatic efforts, technical support, and engagement with international organizations to protect individuals' rights and address the underlying causes of such actions.

Illustrative Scenario

It's crucial to grasp the potential significance of a Digital Alliance Treaty, as it facilitates meaningful connections between a single entity and numerous counterparts worldwide. For instance, picture a region in one part of the world suddenly losing internet connectivity due to government-imposed restrictions. Imagine that if the blackout persists beyond an hour, a vigilant monitoring mechanism situated somewhere else on the planet promptly alerts the affiliated entities within the alliance. This evokes a profound sense of unity, rallying these interconnected entities to swiftly support their darkened counterpart, symbolizing solidarity and reinforcing the collective pursuit of a connected and inclusive digital future. With little overhead, Using efficient communication with pre-existing community buyin - DATs can create significant barriers of awareness for any authoritarian actors.

Significance as a Deterrent System to Authoritarian Regimes

A Digital Alliance Treaty network can serve as a significant deterrent system against authoritarian regimes. By swiftly alerting the global allies of an affected region, these treaties eliminate the advantage of secrecy that such regimes rely on when shutting down internet access in a region. The immediate visibility prevents a shutdown from passing unnoticed and or unaddressed.

Furthermore, these treaties enable small ethnic groups and marginalized communities to garner support from a diverse range of allies, outnumbering the affected population

multiple times over. This collective action not only provides solidarity and assistance but also acts as a powerful deterrent to future repressive measures. The message is clear: the global community is united in defending access to the internet as a human right and ensuring that no voice remains unheard.

Structure of Digital Alliance Treaties (ICR2P)

1. **Multi-Stakeholder Participation:** Encourage participation from diverse stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, technology companies, and academia, fostering a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing digital rights and global voices.
2. **Advocacy Commitments:** Clearly outline the commitments of participating entities to advocate for the digital rights and global voices of other entities in case of internet shutdowns or restrictions. This may include diplomatic efforts, awareness campaigns, international engagements, and legal support.
3. **Support Mechanisms:** Establish mechanisms for providing support to entities facing internet shutdowns or digital censorship. This could involve sharing circumvention tools, facilitating secure communication channels, and providing technical assistance and resources.
4. **Transparent Reporting:** Emphasize the importance of transparent reporting on instances of internet shutdowns, digital censorship, and the measures taken to protect digital rights and global voices. This reporting can contribute to raising awareness, accountability, and the identification of best practices.

Benefits of Digital Alliance Treaties

1. **Empowering Global Voices:** These treaties empower individuals and communities to have their voices heard on the global stage, irrespective of political, geographical, or societal barriers. It ensures that diverse perspectives and experiences contribute to global discussions and decision-making processes.
2. **Strengthening Digital Rights:** By prioritizing the protection of digital rights, the treaties strengthen the foundations of freedom of expression, access to information, and participation in the digital realm, fostering an inclusive and democratic global environment.
3. **Collective Diplomatic Influence:** Through collective advocacy efforts, participating entities gain increased diplomatic influence to address instances of internet shutdowns and digital censorship, exerting pressure on governments to respect and protect digital rights. This pressure can lead to frameworks that cement avenues for sanctions against negative actors.

4. Collaborative Knowledge Sharing: The treaties facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among participating entities, enabling the sharing of best practices, technical expertise, and resources to effectively counter internet shutdowns and promote digital rights.

Implementation and Monitoring

1. Implementation Mechanisms: Participating entities should establish mechanisms for the effective implementation of the treaties, including the formation of joint committees, working groups, or dedicated task forces responsible for coordination, monitoring, and evaluation.
2. Progress Evaluation: Regular progress evaluation should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the treaties and identify areas for improvement. This evaluation can involve benchmarking, impact assessments, and shared reporting on the state of digital rights and global voices.
3. Adaptation and Expansion: The treaties should allow for periodic adaptation to emerging challenges and technological advancements. Furthermore, they should be open to expansion, inviting new entities to join the coalition and reinforcing the collective commitment to protect digital rights and global voices.

Conclusion

Digital Alliance Treaties represent a progressive and inclusive approach to protecting digital rights and enabling individuals to have their voices heard on the global stage. By establishing mutual responsibilities and collaborative mechanisms, these treaties foster global advocacy, strengthen digital rights, and empower diverse voices. The implementation of Digital Alliance Treaties will contribute to a more inclusive and democratic digital environment, ensuring that the rights of individuals are respected and their perspectives are valued in the ever-evolving digital landscape. Most importantly these digital treaties utilize and optimize humanity's first technology "communication" to ensure physical security for the planet's most vulnerable populations.

Town hall Objectives

1. **Understanding the Concept of Digital Alliance Treaties:**
 - Explore the foundations, objectives, and structure of Digital Alliance Treaties.

- Discuss the role of governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in combating internet fragmentation and protecting digital rights.

2. Sharing Experiences and Best Practices:

- Share experiences and lessons learned from existing initiatives and efforts in combating internet fragmentation and advocating for digital rights.
- Highlight best practices, innovative approaches, and successful case studies that demonstrate effective collaboration and cooperation.

3. Strengthening Collaboration:

- Facilitate discussions on the potential for collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in the context of Digital Alliance Treaties.
- Identify areas of mutual interest and opportunities for joint action to address internet fragmentation and protect digital rights.

4. Developing Actionable Strategies:

- Generate concrete strategies and action plans to promote the adoption and implementation of Digital Alliance Treaties.
- Identify avenues for ongoing cooperation, knowledge sharing, and capacity building to combat internet fragmentation.

Town Hall Structure

Speakers:

Harry Halpin - Nym Technologie SA (tech sector) Western European and Others

Morshed Mannan - Coalition of Automated Legal Applications (civil society)

Asia-Pacific States

Primavera De Filippi - CNRS, Harvard Berkman Klein Center (civil society) Western European and Others

Fatemeh Fannizadeh - IDA (civil society) Intergovernmental Organization

Moderator: Jarrell James - TAC (civil society) Intergovernmental Organization

Gbenga Sesan - Paradigm HQ (tech sector) African Group

1. Opening Session:

- Welcome remarks and introduction to the town hall objectives and agenda.
- Keynote addresses highlighting the significance of collaboration in addressing internet fragmentation and protecting digital rights.

2. Panel Discussions:

- Panel 1: Understanding Digital Alliance Treaties - Principles, Structure, and Implementation.
- Panel 2: Experiences and Best Practices in Combating Internet Fragmentation and Promoting Digital Rights.
- 3. Breakout Sessions:
 - Breakout Session 1: Collaboration Between Governments and Civil Society Organizations.
 - Breakout Session 2: Technological Innovations and Tools to Counter Internet Fragmentation.
 - Breakout Session 3: International Cooperation and Engagement with Multilateral Organizations.
- 4. Plenary Session:
 - Reporting from breakout sessions and sharing key insights and recommendations.
 - Group discussions on actionable strategies, next steps, and ongoing collaboration.
- 5. Closing Session:
 - Summary of discussions and key takeaways from the Town Hall.
 - Call to action for continued collaboration and implementation of Digital Alliance Treaties.

Success

This town hall seeks to bring together stakeholders from diverse sectors to explore, discuss, and develop strategies for protecting digital rights and countering internet fragmentation. By sharing experiences, best practices, and innovative solutions, this town hall aims to foster ongoing collaboration and cooperation between governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. Through actionable strategies and collective efforts, we can work towards preserving the openness and accessibility of the internet while ensuring the protection of digital and human rights. At its core; this town hall hopes to provide the start of a focused perspective on the need for grassroots level actionable solutions that ensure internet access for highly vulnerable communities.

Digital Alliance Treaties in the Context of Sustainable Development Goals

Following last years IGF one of the key takeaways in the report on Internet Fragmentation emphasized the critical need for vigilance in addressing the emerging risks of internet fragmentation. It highlights the importance of global cooperation and coordination among various stakeholders to identify early warning signs, assess the impact of policies, and prepare effective measures to counter the implications of such changes. The multi-stakeholder approach is particularly suited to evaluate and monitor the potential unintended consequences of measures affecting the Internet and to propose alternative solutions that mitigate the risks of fragmentation.

Digital Alliance Treaties contribute to the achievement of SDG 9.c, which aims to “significantly increase access to information and communications technology and provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries.” By prioritizing digital rights protection and fostering collaboration between global partners in the event of a shutdown or excessive slowdown, these treaties play a crucial role in eliminating barriers and promoting inclusive digital infrastructure development. They facilitate the sharing of knowledge, resources, and technical expertise among participating entities, enabling the creation of sustainable and accessible digital ecosystems in underserved regions. Digital Alliance Treaties enable governments, civil society organizations, and stakeholders to collaborate effectively in combating internet fragmentation. These treaties empower entities to engage in digital diplomatic advocacy, while also supporting the diversification of communication infrastructure. By doing so, they ensure that communities accross countries receive robust global support in cases where their access to and utilization of the Internet are impeded. This collective effort aims to safeguard the digital rights of individuals and foster an inclusive and connected digital environment worldwide.

In addition this concept contributes to the achievement of SDG 10.3 which aims to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action. Digital Alliance Treaties have the potential to reduce inequalities by amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and supporting their right to advocate for themselves. These treaties prioritize the protection of individuals' right to have their voices heard, irrespective of borders and political boundaries. By actively advocating on behalf of parties affected by internet shutdowns or censorship, Digital Alliance Treaties ensure that their perspectives are represented on the global stage. This collective action and support from diverse allies help bridge the digital divide and promote inclusivity, contributing to the reduction of inequalities in access to information and digital opportunities.