

Background Information

The FOC and Human Rights

The Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) is a group of 37 countries committed to protecting and promoting human rights online, including freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and privacy rights. FOC members coordinate their diplomatic efforts, share information on violations of human rights online, and work together to voice concern over measures that curtail these rights. The FOC also collaborates by issuing joint statements, sharing policy approaches to complex issues, exchanging views on strategy, and planning participation in relevant forums. Additionally, the Coalition provides a platform for multistakeholder engagement through its Advisory Network, which includes non-governmental actors from the private sector, academia, and civil society.

Engagement in Multilateral Fora and Capacity Building

Diplomatic coordination, shaping global norms, and multistakeholder coordination comprise the three overarching areas of the FOC's work. This panel will highlight efforts by the previous and current Chairs to advance an open, free, secure, and reliable Internet, and it will provide an opportunity for next year's FOC Chair to reflect on and think about how to leverage the Coalition. FOC-AN members will participate in the panel as well to underscore the multistakeholder nature of the Coalition and to highlight how the FOC has been used to empower stakeholders.

Under Canada's chairship in 2022, the FOC was active in affirming and shaping global norms. The Coalition facilitated coordination and collaboration between members, as well as capacity-building activities, ahead of the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council to promote human rights in online and digital contexts. The FOC also promoted existing frameworks, including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and UNESCO's recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to counter repressive and authoritarian deployment of AI systems.

This year, a main focus of the U.S. chairship has been on strengthening the FOC as an institution, including by expanding membership. Since January 2023, Slovakia and Iceland have joined the FOC, and Taiwan has

become an Observer. [To-date] South Korea has expressed their intention to join the FOC and the U.S. is in discussions with other governments in the global South to join this year. Other priority areas include promoting and protecting fundamental freedoms; countering growing digital authoritarianism and the misuse of digital technologies; advancing norms, principles, and safeguards for Artificial Intelligence; and strengthening digital inclusion. The FOC published “Guiding Principles on Government Use of Surveillance Technologies” in March of this year, illustrating how governments can maintain their commitment to respect and protect democratic principles, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, consistent with their international obligations and commitments, in the responsible use of surveillance technology. There are also a number of active FOC Task Forces and a Working Group, including on Internet shutdowns, artificial intelligence and human rights, digital equality, and on cooperation with the private sector in Silicon Valley. These task forces and working group meet regularly to coordinate diplomatic efforts on complex and evolving issues and facilitate ongoing dialogue between the private sector and civil society with high-level government representatives.