Inputs on areas that will be discussed at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Expert Group Meeting (EGM)

Submission in response to the call for comments by the IGF Secretariat

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Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

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INTRODUCTION

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is an international network and non-profit organisation working to empower and support organisations, social movements and individuals in and through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Formed in 1990, we were granted category one consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council ECOSOC) in 1995. APC has 57 organisational members and 35 individual members active in 73 countries, mostly in the global South.

APC's mission is to create a just and sustainable world by harnessing the collective power of activists, organisations, excluded groups, communities and social movements, to challenge existing power structures and ensure that the internet is developed and governed as a global public good.

APC has consistently engaged with internet governance issues and processes since the IGF's inception. We have served in the MAG, we have led intersessional activities, and we are active in regional and national IGFs, bringing human rights, social and gender justice lenses to those processes, from a global South perspective. APC will continue to contribute to making internet governance and global digital cooperation accountable, transparent, inclusive, participatory and effective, building on the IGF's historical strengths and achievements.

We welcome the call of IGF Secretariat for inputs commenting on areas that will be discussed at the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) proposed for 30 March - 1 April 2022, in New York, and appreciates the opportunity to provide a few comments below.

1. Concrete changes/improvements proposed

a. Proposals to strengthen and improve the IGF focus and relevance

- *Stimulate strategic discussions on the future of global internet governance in the framework of the IGF.*

  We believe that the IGF, as a vital piece of the internet governance ecosystem and a platform conducive to improving coordination and cooperation in global internet governance and global digital cooperation, has to be strengthened, building on its achievements. In order to improve coordination and cooperation in global internet governance and for the IGF to strengthen its role around it, APC believes it is

important to promote strategic discussions at all levels concerning its future and the future of global internet governance more broadly, so that these processes can lead to an internet governance that contributes to social, gender and environmental justice and human rights.

- *Use the IGF to identify ways to integrate multilateral and multistakeholder approaches.*

  Multistakeholder approaches should complement and enhance international decision-making, keeping in mind that they do not replace multilateralism. "Multilateral institutions benefit from multistakeholder engagement in them, because it brings greater expertise and diversity to bear on complex problems whose solutions need widespread consent as well as quality decision-making. But multistakeholder approaches need multilateral institutions within which to work. They need governments and intergovernmental institutions they can influence. Without those, at best they're going to be talking shops; at worst, they could easily be lost in contests between power-brokers."[1] The IGF should promote a wide and substantive debate oriented to contribute to fixing the relationship between multilateral and multistakeholder.

- Its birth out of a UN summit and its ongoing relationship with the UN system is a source of legitimacy for the IGF, which should be cherished and nurtured. The IGF's location inside the UN reflects the importance of collaboration between multilateral and multistakeholder institutions to ensure that the internet's potential to enable the goals of sustainable development, peace, and respect for human rights is realised. We believe the IGF should remain under the UN umbrella but retain its autonomy.

- There is a significant need for the establishment of agreement on high-level principles for digital cooperation, and more specifically, internet governance and internet-related public policy making. We recommend the development of a core set of principles, through the IGF, which can then be adopted at the United Nations level, that defines critical concepts, builds upon the WSIS principles, and endorses other principles accepted by UN member states, such as the nature of the internet as an enabler of human rights, and recognises that rights which apply offline also apply online. An excellent example of a UN body addressing this is UNESCO's R-

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[1]   https://www.apc.org/en/blog/inside-information-society-mutistakeholderism-and-multilateralism

O-A-M principles,[2] which build on the WSIS principles. We recommend that the IGF Expert Group explores the possibility of these principles being adopted across the UN system, with the IGF playing a key role in that regard. The three primary ways in which we believe these values and principles can be embedded in public and private activities in the digital space are:

- Through formal recognition of these values and principles throughout the UN system and using the IGF as a platform for enabling system-wide assessment and debate on their application in the public and private sector (and in multistakeholder entities).

- By digital cooperation efforts prioritising consideration of the impact of digital and technology-related processes on human rights, gender equality and economic and social development, as well as on the environment – as opposed to prioritising "national security" or the specific interests of corporations, or a narrow growth centric vision of development.

- By ensuring that digital cooperation is inclusive. Effective participation of all relevant stakeholders is both a means to embedding these values and principles as well as an important value and principle in its own right.

b. Proposals to expand and diversify participation in the IGF

● *Ensure diversity in the composition of the IGF Leadership Panel.*

We view the IGF Leadership Panel as one of the many efforts started 10 years ago towards consolidating the IGF as a platform for identifying viable ways to shape, sustain and [3] The IGF should promote a wide and substantive debate oriented to contribute to fixing the relationship between multilateral and multistakeholder. strengthen global digital cooperation. Like other civil society groups, APC is concerned about the risk that with the creation of this new structure, a top-down approach to digital cooperation dominated by few powerful private and political forces could undermine the IGF's legacy. We call on the UN Secretary-General to ensure diversity in the composition of the panel and representation of global South perspectives to counteract this risk and to commit to designing all aspects related to

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2   https://en.unesco.org/internetuniversality/indicators
3   https://www.apc.org/en/blog/inside-information-society-mutistakeholderism-and-multilateralism

the mandate of the Panel in an open and participatory fashion. Genuine and effective democratic global digital governance can be only sustained through high standards of transparency.

- As a means of encouraging government participation, proactively consult with governments and with intergovernmental bodies on issues they would like to see discussed at the IGF.

- Encourage and invite stakeholders from the global South to play prominent roles at the IGF. Funds should be secured to support their participation. This also requires investment of effort around many actors, including developing country governments. The MAG should initiate discussions with these governments very early on in the preparatory process for the annual IGF. Proactive measures should also be taking to involve them in intersessional work.

- *Reinforce the NRIs and facilitate experiences at the national and regional levels, as well as through intersessional work.*

  The prioritisation of under-represented voices in IGF initiatives at the local, national and regional levels will further add to digital discussions.

- *Acknowledge the diversity of "forgotten stakeholders".*

  The tendency to bundle together marginalised groups (such as women and youth, for example) risks offending the movements advocating for their inclusion as well as lack of specificity in efforts to ensure their effective participation.

- *Insert more granularity into the multistakeholder approach.*

  Take into account the internal diversity among stakeholder groups. This is true for all, including governments, civil society and business. Simply inviting a so-called "representative" of different stakeholder groups is not sufficient to ensure inclusion, or reflect the wide range of positions and experiences within stakeholder groups.

- *Consider intersectionality.*

  The challenges posed by the digital divide have the greatest implications for the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in society, based on the intersectionalities of race, gender, class, sexuality and location. The digital environment poses varying

challenges based on the positionality and intersectional identities of the individuals concerned, such as lack of access or representation. It is critical to consider the overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination when working on solutions.

c. Proposals to build links with other decision-making processes and fora concerned with digital and wider public policy issues

- *Raise the profile of the IGF through the work of the IGF Leadership Panel.*

  APC believes that the IGF Leadership Panel should contribute to strengthening and raising the profile of the IGF within the UN system, working hand in hand with the MAG, to complement its efforts. The IGF Leadership Panel should build on the lessons learned from years of MAG operations.

- *Translating the IGF "key messages" into all UN languages.*

Communicating outputs from intersessional work, and the event, and presenting them at relevant policy spaces. This requires:

- o Ensuring that the Secretariat has sufficient capacity, particularly communications capacity.
- o Mapping of ongoing policy spaces and the creation of a mechanism for information sharing to ensure interaction between content and outcomes of discussions at the IGF, and other policy-making spaces. Mapping relevant policy spaces against intersessional work is a much needed step in order maximise and leverage the valuable work that is being done by the IGF community.
- o Building on the current practice of ensuring linkages with other institutions and mechanisms for example, UN Women, Special Rapporteurs to the Human Rights Council, or the UN General Assembly.
- o Reaching out to other policy communities, particularly those involved in development policy, environmental policy, trade, access to knowledge, human rights, women's rights, and democratisation and good governance.

We do not expect the IGF to achieve this on its own, but through well-coordinated cooperation with other networks, institutions and agencies, inside the UN and outside it. APC believes that a key element of a more effective IGF consists of strengthening the participation of governments in the IGF process, and ensuring that they gain concrete benefit from this participation.

d. Proposals to develop and promote effective outputs

- Identify and map current policy discussions that the IGF could feed into at the outset of the preparatory process. This could enable more effective communication (including visualisation) of outputs of the global IGF. The input on themes given to the Secretariat can be included in this mapping.

- Strengthen proactive engagement on programme content and themes with the conveners of national and regional IGFs.

- Consider changing the overall structure for the IGF to have two days of workshops followed by two days of main sessions interspersed with round tables and Best Practice Forums. This structure will enable deepening of the discussion on some topics, and facilitate developing key messages, outcomes, and input into the work programme for the next cycle of intersessional work.

- Workshops are a way of bringing people to the IGF and building community ownership, and therefore limiting their number must be done with care.

- Continue to avoid workshops on common themes running concurrently. Event design could facilitate a process whereby they can reinforce and interact with one another rather than compete.

- Consider building in some open slots into the programme which can be used for networking or unscheduled sessions.

- Ensure that the IGF agenda responds to issues that matter to under-represented groups, who often have existing capacity in relation to these areas, and can share their knowledge with the IGF community. Examples include people with disabilities, people living in rural areas without sufficient infrastructure, people from small island states and indigenous people. One way of doing this would be to cluster the

feedback received in response to the call for input in such a way that issues relevant to under-represented groups are tagged as such.

- Balance taking into account the priorities and particularities of different regions while continuing to address global issues and explore linkages between global, regional and national levels.

- IGF intersessional work has steadily strengthened, and it should be sustained and receive greater prominence. Keep increasing the profile given to the outputs of intersessional work.

- Assign all the necessary secretariat support to the Working Group on IGF Strategy and build recommendations into the IGF's annual plan and budget.

- An area that we want to stress as needing improvement is the relationship between DCs, BPFs, and PNs. It is also necessary to improve the linkages between DCs, BPFs, PNs and NRIs.

- MAG members and delegates of the IGF Secretariat should aim to attend as many NRIs as possible (in their regions, ideally) to stimulate cross-fertilization among the regional and the global processes.

We want to note, however, that outputs come in many different shapes and sizes. The value of the IGF as a multistakeholder space that can build understanding, relationships and consensus because it does not have to negotiate outcomes, should not be underestimated.

2. Effective alignment of IGF activities with the action lines included in the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation

- *Clearly define the scope of the Leadership Panel of the 2022 and 2023 IGF.*

  It is expected that 2022 will be a critical year to set the tone for the development of both digital cooperation and internet governance for the next decade. The IGF should be strengthened as a platform conducive to improving coordination and cooperation in global internet governance and global digital cooperation, building on

its achievements. We expect that the new Leadership Panel of the 2022 and 2023 IGF cycles will contribute to consolidating the IGF as a platform for identifying viable ways to shape, sustain and strengthen global digital cooperation by reinforcing and raising the profile of the IGF within the UN system, working hand in hand with the MAG, to complement its efforts. The IGF Leadership Panel should build on the lessons learned from years of MAG operations. For this objective to be achieved, it is essential to ensure diversity in the composition of the panel, including representation of global South perspectives, and implementation of the process related to the mandate of the Panel in an open and participatory fashion. Genuinely effective and democratic global digital governance can only be sustained through high standards of transparency.

- *Ensure effective linkages between the IGF and the mandate of the UN Tech Envoy.*

  APC sees the Tech Envoy role as crucial to promoting improved coordination and synergy among different spaces and processes concerning internet governance and global digital cooperation. We believe the role offers a unique opportunity to make significant progress in the application of the multistakeholder principles and approach by bringing together member states, the technology industry, civil society and other stakeholders to work with the mandate. We look forward to establishing a dynamic of dialogue and collaboration with the Envoy in relation to the setting up of the mandate's agenda and work plan. Some of the key areas highlighted in the Roadmap have clear signposts identified for the work ahead. This is not, however, true in relation to all of them. Lack of commitment and the influence of geopolitical agendas have negatively impacted on the cooperation among states that is needed to tackle the most urgent issues in the digital agenda, including, for example, cybersecurity. Significant progress needs to be seen in the near future in the expansion not only of connectivity, but of meaningful access to ICTs, especially to marginalised individuals and communities. A more effective and impactful internet governance architecture needs renewed commitment and engagement from all stakeholders. In particular, APC believes the mandate can play a key role to facilitate synergies and collaboration among different mechanisms, for example, between the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) process and broader global digital cooperation.

3. The role of the IGF in convening the multistakeholder digital technology track and in developing the Digital Compact proposed in Our Common Agenda report

- *Ensure a well-resourced IGF and promote the multistakeholder model.*

    Commit to preserve and strengthen the multistakeholder model, particularly by convincing Member States to ensure that UN policymaking processes must be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, and that existing fora tasked with internet governance challenges, in particular the IGF, are further strengthened with appropriate human resources and funding. Meaningful participation of interested and informed stakeholders at the IGF is essential to ensure that outcomes are effective. It is particularly important to ensure the meaningful participation of stakeholders from the global South and others typically under-represented groups in the IGF and in global public policymaking pertaining to the Internet, including women.

4. The future of the IGF after 2025

So far, there is no other forum which is at the same time multistakeholder, open and inclusive, but also linked to the existing UN intergovernmental system where all States have a voice. The IGF has become a platform for civil society to gather and take stock and to engage in debate with other stakeholder groups. We would like to see a strengthened IGF with greater participation of governments and private sector actors, with stronger sustained capacity to build links with other decision-making processes and fora concerned with digital and wider public policy issues, including the UN SG Roadmap on Digital Cooperation and the Digital Compact proposed in Our Common Agenda report.

We recommend that member states support the renewal of the IGF for at least a further 10 years after the WSIS+20 review.

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