

15th of August 2008

Dear IGF Secretariat and Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group,

The Dynamic Coalition on the Internet Bill of Rights respectfully requests that the issue of rights and the internet is made a core agenda topic for the IGF. The Dynamic Coalition notes that, through the "openness" theme, rights have been a central topic in the previous IGFs, and is concerned that this topic appears to have been pushed down the draft agenda for this year's IGF in Hyderabad.

We are greatly concerned by the significant reduction of emphasis on "openness" and "diversity" in the current agenda for Hyderabad. In particular, "openness and privacy" are only mentioned as a half of a sub-item of the general "Promoting Cyber-security and Trust" main theme. Rather than promoting positive discussion about how to expand the opportunities that the internet offers for realizing our fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined in international law, the title of the main security theme plays on negativity and fear of the internet. We are concerned that the sessions will focus on security measures, without adequate discussion of how to ensure that these do not erode the capacity of the internet to support and advance human rights, for example to expression, culture, privacy and development.

Given that, in addition to the IBR Dynamic Coalition, several other coalitions and IGF participants are also concerned over the limited consideration of rights on the program, we respectfully ask the Secretariat and Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group to reconsider the draft agenda and to add "Rights and the Internet" as a core theme for Hyderabad, and to work towards incorporating 'Rights and the Internet' into the IGF Cairo agenda as an overarching theme.

We recognize that development of the draft agenda is well underway, but feel that it would still be possible to adapt the agenda without undue impact on the ongoing workshop merger process, by reorienting the sub-theme main session "Fostering Security, Privacy and Openness" to focus on rights. The issue of security would be better addressed in the partnering sub-theme session, coupled with the issue of cybercrime. The main plenary session could then bring these two strands together. Another possibility to give rights a more prominent stance would be to change the title of the main theme, "Promoting Cyber-security and Trust" to, "Balancing Security and Trust with Openness and Freedoms (or Rights)".

As we wrote in the Dynamic Coalition report submitted to the Secretariat on 30th June, the coalition would like to offer its support in helping to shape such a session in partnership with the workshop organisers who have opted to merge with it. We also stand ready to engage in a dialogue with the Secretariat and Advisory Group in order to ensure that rights receive adequate attention at the IGF.

We thank you for your consideration and await your response.

Kind regards,
The Internet Bill of Rights Coalition

Please also note that the Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus has expressed its full support and endorsement of the letter.

About the Internet Bill of Rights Coalition

The Internet Bill of Rights Dynamic Coalition is acting as an umbrella coalition for all individuals and groups who are concerned with rights issues and internet governance. The internet has unleashed a raft of opportunities to protect and expand our human rights as protected by international law, and offers significant new possibilities for development and empowerment. However, the internet also presents us with serious challenges, including how to balance the social goods that stem from the openness of the internet with the need for security, and how to ensure that the benefits that the internet brings are shared by all. The Dynamic Coalition on the Internet Bill of Rights is working to address these issues, with a view to ensuring that human rights are integral to internet governance processes and decisions.

Our membership is diverse in terms of stakeholders, geography and view points. For example, some people in the coalition are concerned with ensuring that our rights are protected when we use the internet, some are working to ensure that rights underpin the norms that guide internet governance, and others are seeking to establish rights to the internet so that all have access to the benefits and opportunities it supports. Yet all of our members are keen to see a greater focus on rights in the main agenda of the IGF so that these important issues can be given the attention that they deserve.

The topic of the "Internet Bill of Rights", as a specific IGF main agenda item and long-term goal, has already received a significant degree of wide spread interest and support. This has included an appeal by illustrious people at the second WSIS in Tunis, massive participation in the Coalition's workshops in Athens and Rio, a dedicated international conference in Rome with attendees from over 70 countries, and an official declaration by the governments of Italy and Brazil. We also note that organizations such as the Council of Europe and the Association for Progressive Communications have made similar requests for a stronger focus on rights at the IGF.