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**ORAL STATEMENT**

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UN Global Digital Compact  
Thematic Deep Dives: Internet Governance  
UN Headquarters, New York

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Excellencies, colleagues, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this Thematic Deep Dive on Internet Governance.

Unfettered access to the open, stable, and secure internet is vital for the protection and fulfillment of fundamental rights.

The internet survived an unplanned stress test in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating its resilience, and its crucial role in delivering access to life-saving information, to work and learning opportunities, and to communication with loved-ones worldwide.

But our institutions cannot remain neutral on this moving train.

How will the wave of state sanctions affect technical resources like naming and numbering? Is the climate, or the rule of law, strong enough to support localization of data centers and infrastructure? Are our institutions ready to welcome the next billion online? These and other pressing questions must be addressed as we move forward.

We remain cautious about proposals to create new mechanisms, but agree the internet's governance requires constant review -- and this review will not progress absent more inclusive, and robust participation. Yet responsiveness to stakeholder input remains inconsistent and human rights due diligence, which is key to effective policy, sits in early stages.

Our digital home lies on shaky foundations, subject to the whims of arbitrary disruption and manipulation. And we do not enjoy the benefit of time.

For many, the internet has yet to arrive; for women and girls, in all their diversity, and those in the global majority, the knowledge society is largely unrealized. Threats to the open, secure, and stable internet continue to rise. Those suffering internet shutdowns cannot depend on this network of networks to grow their education, build their incomes, or find safe migration routes. These attacks on the public core of the internet offend basic values of digital cooperation and running code.

Once online, we confront insecure spaces set up to collect and commoditize our data in central coffers, rather than to distribute equitable access to our commons. Our domains suffer malicious spoofing, what we term Fake Domains, without recourse. Even the digital home of civil society, dot org, lost

protection against rate hikes and was nearly sold to a private equity firm. Only sustained outcry from hundreds of organizations and allies prevented this.

Some governments and law enforcement agencies still ill-advisedly advocate for the weakening of encryption – a critical tool for cybersecurity and privacy. Internet shutdowns, digital security threats, and vanishing civic space disproportionately impact women and LGBTQ+ persons. Internet governance must employ an intersectional lens to address disproportionate and systemic impacts.

Progress requires inclusive, deliberate, multi-stakeholder governance and meaningful participation by all those affected, especially those at-risk. We cannot succeed alone. States must resist the urge to supplant or upend the oversight that maintains the internet as we know, while redoubling support for open convenings.

There is precedent: At the first WSIS convening States moved with a diverse set of actors to agree that all people should together build and enjoy the Information Society. The IGF further serves as a robust deliberative forum that should be strengthened and sustained. At the very least, the Global Digital Compact should commit to a vision of digital transformation centered on human rights, building on the openness of the IGF and WSIS platforms and ICANN's structures. We strive to create such a space at RightsCon – the world's leading summit on human rights in the digital age. Demand for financial and technical assistance to join our event consistently exceeds our capacity, and shows the relevance of convenings like this to a much broader community than you see today. Our community stands united, not fragmented, in demanding we are heard and our inputs acted upon at the table of internet governance.

The integration of human rights into policy and process requires the expertise of all stakeholders, particularly those of civil society, who are most at risk.

Thank you.



**Access Now** (<https://www.accessnow.org>) defends and extends the digital rights of people and communities at risk. As a grassroots-to-global organization, we partner with local actors to bring a human rights agenda to the use, development, and governance of digital technologies, and to intervene where technologies adversely impact our human rights. By combining direct technical support, strategic advocacy, grassroots grantmaking, and convenings such as RightsCon, we fight for human rights in the digital age.

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