

8 May 2023



## **ORAL STATEMENT**

UN Global Digital Compact  
Thematic Deep Dives: Human Rights Online  
UN Headquarters, New York

*Intended delivery by: Marwa Fatafa, Interim Director of Policy and International Programs and MENA Policy and Advocacy Manager, Access Now<sup>1</sup>*

Excellencies, colleagues, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this Thematic Deep Dive on Human Rights Online. My name is Marwa Fatafa and I am the Interim Director of Policy and International Programs at Access Now.

Any future compacts, commitments, and coordination on digital technology must find their grounding and guidance in the international human rights law framework.

This theme resonates through all of the deep dives: there is no hope for meaningful connectivity and inclusion, for effective data protection or robust trust and safety without a human-centric, human rights based approach that reflects the needs and rights of everyone, in all of their diversity.

We at Access Now and our partners in civil society have worked for over a decade to bring online content moderation and platform governance models into alignment with human rights. However, we are left to decry crisis after crisis, from Myanmar to Palestine to the United States, where authorities fail to regulate, actors exploit gaps in content governance, and platforms could not and/or would not consistently respect human rights and protect their users.

Access Now was co-champion of the Roundtable on Digital Cooperation covering Digital Human Rights. We are proud of the outputs, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights gathering all its guidance intersecting with tech and making it accessible. But the speed with which stakeholders moved on from that initiative, and the slow progress on important projects like UN Guidance on Human Rights Due Diligence for Digital Tech, gives us pause. How will any promises or outputs on human rights in the Global Digital Compact integrate with existing work streams, reinforcing the IGF, the WSIS process and UN Human Rights work?

To be clear, we do not need new rights for the cyber sphere. We do not need yet another declaration that implies our current international framework is insufficient in the digital age. Our rights are fundamental, indivisible, and universal — online and offline.

What we need is a meaningful commitment to protect, respect, and remedy violations. Such a commitment requires resources, laws and regulation, and also support for civil society, from the grassroots to the global, to monitor and implement.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement was ultimately not delivered orally on 8 May 2023.

We therefore call on the Global Digital Compact to:

1. Combat internet shutdowns in full compliance with international human rights law. Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition – more than 300 organizations from 105 countries – documented 187 internet shutdowns across 35 countries in 2022 alone. This is the highest number of countries to hit the kill switch in a single year, and the practice continues as we currently witnessed in Sudan as the country plunged into armed conflict.
2. Ensure that commitments to limit the abusive use of surveillance technologies, including spyware, translate to appropriate action, laws, and policies on targeted surveillance aligned with international human rights standards, including bans where needed.
3. Provide full transparency on content governance policy design and enforcement, including through ongoing, rapid and conflict-sensitive human rights due diligence to identify and mitigate any actual or foreseeable negative impact on human rights; as well as create accessible grievance reporting mechanisms to affected people and communities.
4. Adopt an intersectional approach responsive and welcoming to diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, and those with disabilities.
5. Renew support for the UN Human Rights system and participation by underrepresented actors in internet governance and related processes, accessible to those with disabilities.

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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