

Global Digital Justice Forum's Statement to the Chairperson and Organizers of WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event 2024

We are at an inflection point— one that presents a now or never ultimatum. The global digital order characterized by extreme inequality, human rights violations, and a snowballing environmental crisis is untenable. It reflects a wild departure from the WSIS vision of a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented information society. It demands a step change.

Over the past days, this High Level event has taken stock of the complex and multi-layered questions that confront us. Our collective reflection, here, points to the urgent need for a renewed commitment to make the WSIS+20 process a defining moment for radical action.

We know that governments are currently in discussions about the future of global digital cooperation, attempting to forge the Global Digital Compact. WSIS values and principles need to be well within the frame of these negotiations.

As a progressive civil society coalition, the Global Digital Justice Forum seeks to reclaim digital power back from neoliberal forces for the people of the Global South. We would like to see the WSIS+20 milestone shape the future of digital policy towards vibrant, peaceful, and pluralistic societies that cherish human freedom, equality, social justice, gender justice, and the rights of nature.

The WSIS+20 review should embrace a grammar of global digital cooperation that is inclusive, development-oriented, and human rights-based. Our futures cannot be held under siege of mercantile greed nor of state repression and excess.

WSIS action line facilitators and stakeholders should identify and boldly address the challenges to implementation stemming from market power concentration and the gaping divides in data and digital infrastructure that prevent the majority from being full participants in the digital paradigm.

We call for reinvigorated effort under the WSIS action lines based on international cooperation and collaboration among all relevant stakeholders.

Action lines must be redefined in the following directions:

- Common standards for digital public goods that emphasize democratic ownership and control and transparent, and accountable governance of digital public infrastructure. (Action Line C1)
- Universal access to meaningful connectivity and steps to dismantle the walled gardens of private platform services, address fragmentation of network standards, and foster the development of multiple and diverse technologies. (Action Line C2)
- Measures to protect media pluralism and diversity, tackling head on the risks to democratic integrity, especially hate speech, cyber-violence, and misinformation, stemming from algorithms gone rogue, (Action Line C3), as well as to promote the right to communicate in social media and immersive internet environments. (Action Line C9)
- Critical and transformative digital education, civic literacy for the age of algorithmified public life, and investment in human development for empowered participation of all in the global AI economy. (Action Line C4)
- Global agreement to end the militarization and weaponization of cybertechnologies and AI. (Action Line C5)
- An integrated approach that recognizes continuities between internet related public policy and data and AI governance. (Action Line C6)
- A strong 'data for development' agenda that explores appropriate and rule-based data sharing at global, regional and national levels to achieve the SDGs. (Action Line C7)
- Governance frameworks for generative AI development to protect the knowledge sovereignty of indigenous communities and to ensure an open science and innovation culture that benefits all of humanity. (Action Line C8)
- Benchmarks and guidelines on digital human rights at the multilateral level. (Action Line C10)
- Removal of barriers to effective international cooperation on data and AI – specifically, the lack of flexibilities in IP regimes in AI value chains; constraining clauses in digital trade agreements; stifling of digital industrial policy choices of developing countries in the data economy; and lack of compute power in the majority world. (Action Line C11)

The gaping democratic deficit in global digital cooperation, today, must be addressed on an urgent footing. We believe this is possible only through concerted action to implement the WSIS Tunis Agenda in full. The much-vaunted multistakeholder principle in digital policy processes must promote democratic debate and account for genuine deliberation, where civil society voices, especially from the margins, are legitimized, and checks

and balances are in place to prevent corporate capture. We call upon governments to fulfil their obligations to:
a) hold corporations accountable and b) enable conditions for protecting and promoting human rights online.

The Snowden revelations in 2013 was a sobering moment— one that the [WSIS +10 milestone in 2015](#) acknowledged in the duty of the state to protect the right of people not to be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy. Ten years since, a sociality of brazen data extractivism continues unabated— with our autonomy as individuals, communities, and nations undermined to a point of servitude. The task for WSIS+20 is clearly cut out— from civil society we wish to see a digital future, with dignity for all.