

The 'Dynamic Coalition on Gender' of the IGF strongly supports the extension of the mandate of the IGF beyond the initial five years.

In particular, the Gender DC calls upon all stakeholders to support an extension of the mandate in a direction that further strengthens the IGF's policy role. As the Gender DC has pointed out before, access to a free and open Internet is critical for women to access information and to facilitate the full realisation of their rights. The provisioning of a gender-just Internet is therefore a fundamental social policy that needs to be developed and implemented systematically at global, regional, national and local levels. The IGF has played and continues to play a vital role in this process. The extension of its mandate should be approached as an opportunity to strengthen this crucially valuable role.

Although important progress has been made in this regard – for which we have expressed our appreciation on earlier occasions – the Gender DC believes that the processes of the IGF remain insufficiently gendered. If we, as stakeholders in the IGF process, are committed to ensuring gender justice, then we need to work towards more attention for social, rather than core technical issues, and for the social angle of technical issues; we need to integrate gender perspectives in all public policy debates regarding the use and development of the Internet; and we need to involve women and gender experts as speakers, panelists and workshop proponents in all sessions.

Moreover, as most of the world's women continue to be from the South, and poor, a greater representation of Southern actors is needed, and greater diversity within this representation. Similarly, the continued and consistent foregrounding of development as a crucial cross-cutting issue is essential. In line with what was initially foreseen in paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda, which lays out the IGF mandate, the structural linkages between the IGF and UN agencies such as UNIFEM should, therefore, be further developed and strengthened.

Ultimately, a rights based approach to Internet governance is the only safeguard for women to fully enjoy the potential benefits of the Internet. Unfortunately, from a feminist social justice perspective, the IGF has not yet succeeded in mainstreaming a strong rights-based framework to provide guidance for the tackling of difficult issues. This would be direly needed in a climate which at times appears doubly short-circuited by the political climate surrounding terrorism and the social panic surrounding child pornography. In this climate, care must be taken to remember that answers and strategies will not do much good if they only result from knee-jerk or automatic type of responses, rather than thorough considerations of the issues involved from historical, geopolitical, economic, social and rights-based, gender sensitive bases. Moreover, in the absence of such an overarching framework, links between different meetings within the IGF remain tenuous at best. For all these reasons, the Dynamic Coalition on Gender strongly supports the suggestion made by the Internet Governance Caucus and other groups to make “Internet Rights and Principles” the overarching framework of the forthcoming IGF in Egypt.