

## **Statement of the Gender and Internet Governance Dynamic Coalition at the Internet Governance Forum 2008**

*This statement was presented at the main session titled 'Taking Stock and Moving Forward'.*

The IGF Dynamic Coalition on Gender appreciates the recognition in discussions at this IGF of the fact that women constitute a fundamental stakeholder in the information society, and that they play a crucial role. We hope that the IGF will now build on this important beginning, and will attempt to fully integrate gender concerns in its work. The three sectors within the IGF's defining feature of multistakeholderism are not monolithic, unitary and consistent actors. Greater effort is required to bring women's diverse perspectives to the forefront in each stakeholder group. Ultimately, a rights based approach to Internet governance is the only safeguard for women to fully enjoy the potential benefits of the Internet.

Two main thematic issues discussed from gender perspectives in this IGF clearly illustrate some of the ways in which Internet governance implicates rights of central concern to women. Access to the Internet is critical for women to access information that may not be available to them otherwise, and to facilitate the full realisation of their rights. For women from marginalized communities especially, the Internet can also function as the harbinger of citizenship rights – bridging their right to be informed with the duty of governance institutions to inform. The provisioning of the Internet therefore is a fundamental social policy issue. Policy that aims to make the Internet available only to one billion at a time is not an adequate response. From a rights-perspective, access to the Internet is, indeed, crucial to all.

The questions of openness, privacy and security have clear gendered angles as well. The Internet is fast becoming a means of asserting IP and proprietising and commercialising knowledge. This process divests knowledge of the communitarian and public value upon which the daily lives of the vast majority of women rests. In addition, women's ability to assert rights beyond national territories and shape human rights debates and development alternatives cannot happen in a context where the Internet is increasingly controlled by states and corporations. Many women risk their lives to share information about injustices on the Internet. We must have deeper and more sophisticated understanding of basic concepts like privacy, harm and protection that we base our responses on. This is especially important for women facing additional vulnerabilities due to violence, their sexualities or lack of opportunities. By centering women's realities in our analysis, we can support the internet's ability to save lives, instead of putting vulnerable communities at risk.

How to guarantee that women's rights will be addressed? Just like women's rights to education, health and livelihoods cannot be bartered in the name of revenue models or public-private partnerships, so also, their right to the Internet cannot be marginalized in the befuddling rhetoric on the right business models. While the market may also have a role to play, gender justice can only be guaranteed through appropriate global, regional, national and local policy.

In Athens, the participation of women stood at 30 percent, in Rio, it was 31 percent. While this is a relatively good representation, we call upon all stakeholders in the IGF to ensure that in the next edition of the Internet Governance Forum, this is reflected in the visibility of women as speakers, panelists and workshop proponents. Women and gender experts should be actively included in all endeavors of framing the regulation mechanisms and policy models.

In addition, It is essential that gender perspectives are included in all public policy debates regarding the use and development of the Internet. We therefore call upon the the international

community to devote the next IGF to the theme of a rights-based approach to the Internet. For a majority of the world's women, the Internet represents an enabling paradigm that can guarantee not merely their communication rights, but expand all of their rights. As long as women's rights have not been addressed, the dream of an Internet for All will remain unrealised.