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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Declaration for the Future of the Internet

Delegations will find in Annex the Declaration for the Future of the Internet.

A DECLARATION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNET

We are united by a belief in the potential of digital technologies to promote connectivity, democracy, peace, the rule of law, sustainable development, and the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. As we increasingly work, communicate, connect, engage, learn, and enjoy leisure time using digital technologies, our reliance on an open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet will continue to grow. Yet we are also aware of the risks inherent in that reliance and the challenges we face.

We call for a new Declaration for the Future of the Internet that includes all partners who actively support a future for the Internet that is open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, and secure. We further affirm our commitment to protecting and respecting human rights online and across the digital ecosystem. Partners in this Declaration intend to work toward an environment that reinforces our democratic systems and promotes active participation of every citizen in democratic processes, secures and protects individuals' privacy, maintains secure and reliable connectivity, resists efforts to splinter the global Internet, and promotes a free and competitive global economy. Partners in this Declaration invite other partners who share this vision to join us in working together, with civil society and other stakeholders, to affirm guiding principles for our role in the future of the global Internet.

Reclaiming the Promise of the Internet

The immense promise that accompanied the development of the Internet stemmed from its design: it is an open “network of networks”, a single interconnected communications system for all of humanity. The stable and secure operation of the Internet’s unique identifier systems have, from the beginning, been governed by a multistakeholder approach to avoid Internet fragmentation, which continues to be an essential part of our vision. For business, entrepreneurs, and the innovation ecosystem as a whole, interconnection promises better access to customers and fairer competition; for artists and creators, new audiences; for everyone, unfettered access to knowledge. With the creation of the Internet came a swell in innovation, vibrant communication, increased cross-border data flows, and market growth—as well as the invention of new digital products and services that now permeate every aspect of our daily lives.

Over the last two decades, however, we have witnessed serious challenges to this vision emerge. Access to the open Internet is limited by some authoritarian governments and online platforms and digital tools are increasingly used to repress freedom of expression and deny other human rights and fundamental freedoms. State-sponsored or condoned malicious behavior is on the rise, including the spread of disinformation and cybercrimes such as ransomware, affecting the security and the resilience of critical infrastructure while holding at risk vital public and private assets. At the same time, countries have erected firewalls and taken other technical measures, such as Internet shutdowns, to restrict access to journalism, information, and services, in ways that are contrary to international human rights commitments and obligations. Concerted or independent actions of some governments and private actors have sought to abuse the openness of Internet governance and related processes to advance a closed vision.

Moreover, the once decentralized Internet economy has become highly concentrated and many people have legitimate concerns about their privacy and the quantity and security of personal data collected and stored online. Online platforms have enabled an increase in the spread of illegal or harmful content that can threaten the safety of individuals and contribute to radicalization and violence. Disinformation and foreign malign activity is used to sow division and conflict between individuals or groups in society, undermining respect for and protection of human rights and democratic institutions.

Our Vision

We believe we should meet these challenges by working towards a shared vision for the future of the Internet that recommits governments and relevant authorities to defending human rights and fostering equitable economic prosperity. We intend to ensure that the use of digital technologies reinforces, not weakens, democracy and respect for human rights; offers opportunities for innovation in the digital ecosystem, including businesses large and small; and, maintains connections between our societies. We intend to work together to protect and fortify the multistakeholder system of Internet governance and to maintain a high level of security, privacy protection, stability and resilience of the technical infrastructure of the Internet.

We affirm our commitment to promote and sustain an Internet that: is open, free, global, interoperable, secure, and reliable and to ensure that the Internet reinforces democratic principles and human rights and fundamental freedoms; offers opportunities for collaborative research and commerce; is developed, governed, and deployed in an inclusive way so that unserved and underserved communities, particularly those coming online for the first time, can navigate it safely and with personal data privacy and protections in place; and is governed by multistakeholder processes. In short, an Internet that can deliver on the promise of connecting humankind and helping societies and democracies to thrive.

The Internet should operate as a single, decentralized network of networks – with global reach and governed through the multi-stakeholder approach, whereby governments and relevant authorities partner with academics, civil society, the private sector, technical community and others. Digital technologies reliant on the Internet, will yield the greatest dividends when they operate as open, free, global, interoperable, secure, and reliable systems. Digital technologies should be produced, used, and governed in ways that enable trustworthy, free, and fair commerce; avoid unfair discrimination between, and ensure effective choice for, individual users; foster fair competition and encourage innovation; promote and protect human rights; and, foster societies where:

- Human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the well-being of all individuals are protected and promoted;
- All can connect to the Internet, no matter where they are located, including through increased access, affordability, and digital skills;
- Individuals and businesses can trust the safety and the confidentiality of the digital technologies they use and that their privacy is protected;
- Businesses of all sizes can innovate, compete, and thrive on their merits in a fair and competitive ecosystem;
- Infrastructure is designed to be secure, interoperable, reliable, and sustainable;
- Technology is used to promote pluralism and freedom of expression, sustainability, inclusive economic growth, and the fight against global climate change.

Principles to promote this Vision

The partners in this Declaration intend to uphold a range of key principles, set out below, regarding the Internet and digital technologies; to promote these principles within existing multilateral and multistakeholder fora; to translate these principles into concrete policies and actions; and, work together to promote this vision globally, while respecting each other's regulatory autonomy within our own jurisdictions and in accordance with our respective domestic laws and international legal obligations. These principles are not legally binding but should rather be used as a reference for public policy makers, as well as citizens, businesses, and civil society organizations.

Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

- Dedicate ourselves, in conducting and executing our respective domestic authorities, to respect human rights, including as reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the principles of the rule of law, legitimate purpose, non-arbitrariness, effective oversight, and transparency, both online and offline, and call upon others to do the same.
- Promote online safety and continue to strengthen our work to combat violence online, including sexual and gender-based violence as well as child sexual exploitation, to make the Internet a safe and secure place for everyone, particularly women, children, and young people.
- Promote safe and equitable use of the Internet for everyone, without discrimination based on sex, race, color, ethnic, national or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of an indigenous population, property, birth, disability, age, gender identity or sexual orientation.

- Reaffirm our commitment that actions taken by governments, authorities, and digital services including online platforms to reduce illegal and harmful content and activities online be consistent with international human rights law, including the right to freedom of expression while encouraging diversity of opinion, and pluralism without fear of censorship, harassment, or intimidation.
- Protect and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms across the digital ecosystem, while providing access to meaningful remedies for human rights violations and abuses, consistent with international human rights law.
- Refrain from misusing or abusing the Internet or algorithmic tools or techniques for unlawful surveillance, oppression, and repression that do not align with international human rights principles, including developing social score cards or other mechanisms of domestic social control or pre-crime detention and arrest.

A Global Internet

- Refrain from government-imposed internet shutdowns or degrading domestic Internet access, either entirely or partially.
- Refrain from blocking or degrading access to lawful content, services, and applications on the Internet, consistent with principles of Net Neutrality subject to applicable law, including international human rights law.
- Promote our work to realize the benefits of data free flows with trust based on our shared values as like-minded, democratic, open and outward looking partners.
- Promote cooperation in research and innovation and standard setting, encourage information sharing regarding security threats through relevant international fora, and reaffirm our commitment to the framework of responsible state behavior in cyberspace.

Inclusive and Affordable Access to the Internet

- Promote affordable, inclusive, and reliable access to the Internet for individuals and businesses where they need it and support efforts to close digital divides around the world to ensure all people of the world are able to benefit from the digital transformation.
- Support digital literacy, skills acquisition, and development so that individuals can overcome the digital divide, participate in the Internet safely, and realize the economic and social potential of the digital economy.
- Foster greater exposure to diverse cultural and multilingual content, information, and news online. Exposure to diverse content online should contribute to pluralistic public discourse, foster greater social and digital inclusion within society, bolster resilience to disinformation and misinformation, and increase participation in democratic processes.

Trust in the Digital Ecosystem

- Work together to combat cybercrime, including cyber-enabled crime, and deter malicious cyber activity.
- Ensure that government and relevant authorities' access to personal data is based in law and conducted in accordance with international human rights law.
- Protect individuals' privacy, their personal data, the confidentiality of electronic communications and information on end-users' electronic devices, consistent with the protection of public safety and applicable domestic and international law.
- Promote the protection of consumers, in particular vulnerable consumers, from online scams and other unfair practices online and from dangerous and unsafe products sold online.

- Promote and use trustworthy network infrastructure and services suppliers, relying on risk-based assessments that include technical and non-technical factors for network security.
- Refrain from using the Internet to undermine the electoral infrastructure, elections and political processes, including through covert information manipulation campaigns.
- Support a rules-based global digital economy which fosters trade and contestable and fair online markets so that firms and entrepreneurs can compete on their merits.
- Cooperate to maximize the enabling effects of technology for combatting climate change and protecting the environment whilst reducing as much as possible the environmental footprint of the Internet and digital technologies.

Multistakeholder Internet Governance

- Protect and strengthen the multistakeholder system of Internet governance, including the development, deployment, and management of its main technical protocols and other related standards and protocols.
- Refrain from undermining the technical infrastructure essential to the general availability and integrity of the Internet.

We believe that the principles for the future of the Internet are universal in nature and as such we invite those who share this vision to affirm these principles and join us in the implementation of this vision. This Declaration takes into account, and expects to contribute to, existing processes in the UN system, G7, G20, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Trade Organization, and other relevant multilateral and multistakeholder fora, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, Internet Governance Forum, and Freedom Online Coalition. We also welcome partnership with the many civil society organizations essential to promoting an open, free, global, interoperable, secure, and reliable Internet, and defending fundamental freedoms and human rights online. Partners in this Declaration intend to consult and work closely with stakeholders in carrying forward this vision.