

## What is the Internet Governance Forum?

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) serves to bring people together from various stakeholder groups as equals, but not to make decisions or negotiate. Instead, they discuss, exchange information and share good practices with each other. While the IGF may not have decision-making abilities, it informs and inspires those who do. The IGF facilitates a common understanding of how to maximize Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges that arise.

The IGF is also a space that gives developing countries the same opportunity to engage in the debate on Internet governance and to facilitate their participation in existing institutions and arrangements. Ultimately, the involvement of all stakeholders, from developed as well as developing countries, is necessary for the future development of the Internet.

### UN Connection

More than 60 years ago, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Negotiators then could not possibly have imagined that a quarter of a century later there would be a new invention, the Internet. And yet, it seems that they had the Internet in mind, when they drafted Article 19:

*“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”*

This Article encapsulates the very essence of the Internet and its borderless nature. The Internet is seen as providing a “crucial ... international platform.” The IGF serve as a laboratory, a neutral space, where all actors can table an issue. The IGF provides a space for dialogue where interested actors can take up an issue without any fear. Nothing they say at the IGF can be held against them. Nobody needs to be afraid of the IGF, since it cannot take “the wrong decision”.

The Internet Governance Forum is an open forum which has no members. It was established by the World Summit of the Information Society in 2006. Since then, it has become the leading global multi-stakeholder forum on public policy issues related to Internet governance.

Its UN mandate gives it convening power and the authority to serve as a neutral space for all actors. As a space for dialogue it can identify issues to be addressed by the international community and shape decisions that will be taken in other forums. The IGF can thereby be useful in shaping the international agenda and in preparing the ground for negotiations and decision-making in other institutions. IGF has no power of redistribution, and yet it has the power of recognition — the power to identify key issues.

A small Secretariat was set up in Geneva to support the IGF, and the Secretary-General appointed a group of advisers, representing all stakeholder groups, to assist him in convening the IGF. The Forum facilitates discussion between representatives from government, private sector, civil society and the technical communities who would exchange information and share best practice.

The United Nations General Assembly agreed in December 2010 to extend the IGF's mandate for another five years. IGF is financed through voluntary contributions.

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