

2010 Southeast Asia Civil Society Statement on Internet Governance

"[The IGF is] multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic, and transparent."
– 2005 Tunis Agenda

"[We call for] a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society...full respect and upholding of universal human rights including freedom of opinion and expression; and "The universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms"
– 2003 Declaration of Principles of World Summit on Information Society.

On the occasion of the first Asia-Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF) Roundtable in Hong Kong on June 15-16, 2010, we, civil society representatives from eight Southeast Asian countries, call on the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and its Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) to fully uphold these aforementioned commitments and principles, as mandated by the United Nations Secretary-General.

We applaud the work of the first APrIGF towards building multi-stakeholder discussion on internet governance. In this vein of inclusive dialogue, we offer the following perspectives and recommendations to the MAG meeting in Geneva at the Palais des Nations on June 28-29, as well as for the fifth annual IGF meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania on September 14-17, 2010.

Key Observations of the APrIGF

In response to the first Asia-Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF) Roundtable in Hong Kong on June 15-16, 2010, we, netizens, journalists, bloggers, IT practitioners and nongovernmental representatives from across Southeast Asia, offer the following observations from the Roundtable:

1. Critical issues of internet governance in Asia should guide future discussions on internet governance policy:

Openness

Open access to information is the right of every individual, a right that serves as a fundamental venue for one's knowledge- and capacity-building. Access to information ultimately helps foster creativity and innovation, thus promoting sustainable human and economic development.

Openness is key to a democratic and open society. Restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression online, such as state censorship which blocks Internet intermediaries, is one of the threats to open societies. Intimidation and state censorship facilitate self-censorship, a hazardous social phenomenon that further undermines democracy and openness.

Access

The internet is for everyone; it is a public good. Yet a Digital Divide between those countries and communities with internet access and those without persists, and has not been sufficiently addressed in discussions on internet governance. Proceedings at the APriGF indicated a higher priority must be placed on addressing not only the global digital divide, but also regional and national ones. While Singapore enjoys high Internet access rates (70% penetration), countries like Burma and Cambodia are at the other end of the spectrum (0.22% and 0.51% penetration, respectively), ranked the lowest of 200 countries studied in the World Bank.

Internet access is fundamental for progress. Various factors, such as political, economic and social development, poverty levels, and technological infrastructure affect whether and how often people can access the internet. Internationally coordinated efforts must be made to address domestic policies that contribute to the digital divide in Southeast Asia and find solutions to bridge the gap.

Cyber Security

Definition of cyber security must include elements that address right to privacy and civil and political freedom.

An individual's right over his/her own privacy, including personal data and information, must not be sacrificed. Information technology, such as IPv6, ZigBee, RFID, when used without transparent and accountable oversight, could pose threats to individual rights.

Today's information society connects personal IT devices directly to the outside world, no longer storing personal data on a single server. Given the involvement of the government and businesses (especially state-owned enterprises) in running such technologies, surveillance and identity theft remain a constant threat against Internet users.

In this regard, any national security policy must not deviate from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all international human rights covenants to which states are parties.

2. Opportunities exist to continue to improve the IGF Process:

Awareness of the IGF in Southeast Asia and at the ASEAN level is presently lacking. Furthermore, Asia-Pacific-wide representation of civil society at the APriGF Roundtable was incomplete. There exists a need not only to develop awareness about the IGF, but also to provide learning materials to make the IGF accessible to all. Greater access to the IGF would help make it more inclusive with various stakeholders, including those from the least developed nations and marginalized and vulnerable groups in Asia-Pacific. During the APriGF Roundtable, an open dialogue and two-way exchange of information and ideas was not fully facilitated. Open space to discuss and articulate criticism and suggest solutions must be guaranteed in all IGF events. Such an effort provides practical benefit to Internet users, both present and future, when the outcome of the APriGF Roundtable is developed into a roadmap. Clarifying and planning the roles of local, national, regional and international multi-stakeholders, will help promote and protect transparent and democratic Internet governance and hence information society in the region.

Recommendation to the IGF

The first APrIGF presented a valuable opportunity to analyze both the issues upon which the IGF focuses and the process by which it is governed. With respect to these priority issues and opportunities for improved processes, we therefore recommend the following:

1. Immediately address as an urgent global internet governance issue the increasing implementation of law that suppress and restrict freedom of expression and access to information, especially within developing countries;
2. Fully integrate the universal human rights agenda into IGF program and engage systematically and regularly with the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, in particular the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the UN Human Rights Council;
3. Ensure that the IGF policy proposals and recommendations are in line with international human rights principles and standards;
4. Strengthen the IGF's multilateralism and openness in the upcoming fifth annual IGF meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania in September and future national and sub-regional level IGF meetings in Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific;
5. Extend the mandate of IGF for another five years;
6. Conduct wider outreach to civil society actors in Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific and allocate financial resources to encourage and support their participation in the fifth annual meeting and subsequent global IGFs, and organize national and sub-regional level IGFs;
7. Ensure active remote participation in the annual meeting and subsequent IGFs, utilizing digital technologies such as live-streaming webcast, video conference, twitter and other social media tools;
8. Guarantee that technical discussions during IGFs fully accommodates new constituents and stakeholders and incorporate an assessment of policy implications on the rights of Internet users and society;
9. Develop a plan of action in order to facilitate follow-up and monitoring of IGF outcomes; and
10. Conduct an impact study by an independent organization to assess the effectiveness of IGF, in accordance with the principles set out in the 2005 Tunis Agenda and the 2003 Declaration of Principles of the WSIS.

Hereby signed by:

Yap Swee Seng

Executive Director
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
(FORUM-ASIA)

E-mail: yap@forum-asia.org
Mobile (Bangkok): +66.81.868.9178
Web: www.forum-asia.org

Chiranuch Premchaiporn

Executive Director
Prachatai Online Newspaper

E-mail: chiranuch@prachatai.com
Mobile (Bangkok): +66.81.6207707
Web: www.prachatai.com;
www.prachatai.org/english

Ernesto G. Sonido Jr

Blogger
TechTanod, the Blog and Soul Movement, the
Philippine Blog Awards

E-mail: 1fishtank@gmail.com
Phone: +63.917829.8090
Web: baratillo.net; techtanod.com

Ndaru

Blogger (Indonesia)

Web: politikana.com

Ou Virak

President
Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

E-mail: ouvirak@cchrcambodia.org
Mobile (Phnom Penh): +855.12.404.051
Web: www.cchrcambodia.org

Phouthasinh Phimmachanh

Senior Knowledge Management Officer
Swiss Association for International Development
(Helvetas-Laos)

Email: phouthasinh.phimmachanh@helvetas.org
Phone (Laos): +856.21.740.253

Sean Ang

Executive Director
Southeast Asian Center for e-Media (SEACeM)

E-mail: sean@seacem.com
Mobile (Kuala Lumpur): +60.166.533.533
Web: www.seacem.com

Chuah Siew Eng

Publicity Officer
Centre for Independent Journalism

Email: sieweng.cij@gmail.com
Phone (Kuala Lumpur): +60.340.230.772
Web: cijmalaysia.org

Leang Delux

Active member
Club of Cambodian Journalist

E-mail: deluxnews@gmail.com
Mobile (Cambodia): +855.15.523.623
Web: www.ccj.com.kh

Oliver Robillo

Founder
Mindanao Bloggers Community

E-mail: blogie@dabawenyo.com
Mobile (Davao): +63.918.540.0878
Web: www.mindanaobloggers.com

Phisit Siprasatthong

Coordinator
Thai Netizen Network

E-mail: freethainetizen@gmail.com
Phone (Bangkok): +66.2691.0574
Web: thainetizen.org

**Civil Society Representatives from Burma
and Vietnam**