



April, 13th and 14th 2016

To: *The Honorable Ministers of Finance and Dignitaries*

present at the 2016 Spring Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank Group

CC: United States Secretary of State John Kerry; World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim

Dear Honorable Ministers and Dignitaries,

We write to you as a group of civil society organizations who are actively engaged in a collaborative effort to strengthen policies and investments directed to increasing the access, adoption, and use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), particularly broadband internet access. We ask you to work towards universal, open, secure, and affordable broadband connectivity, with full protection of human rights.

As a general purpose technology, the impact of ICTs extends well beyond productivity gains. ICTs are vectors of economic and social transformation and economic growth. Based on the data of the Inter-American Development Bank, with every 10 percent increase in high speed internet connections, economic growth increases by 3.2 percent,¹ and at the global level, according to the World Bank, the average increase is 1.3 percent.² According to McKinsey & Company, most of the economic value created by the internet benefits traditional businesses, rather than the technology sector.³ ICTs provide economic opportunities to urban and rural populations, men, women and youth, and to marginalized communities.

Despite the growing access to broadband, over four billion people lack access to the internet. As civil society organizations, we cannot accept this enormous digital divide, which prevents the exercise of fundamental human rights for all. Such inequality also reveals an untapped development opportunity. Thus, we urge the Ministers of Finance attending the 2016 Spring Meetings of the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) to guarantee that internet connectivity becomes an integral part of national development policies moving forward. Internet connectivity

¹ IDB launches DigiLAC, a new platform for measuring broadband penetration in Latin America, May 14, 2014

<http://www.iadb.org/en/news/news-releases/2014-05-14/index-that-measures-broadband-penetration,10816.html>

² World Bank Information Communications Technology for Development <http://live.worldbank.org/information-communications-technology-development>

³ Internet matters: The Net's sweeping impact on growth, jobs, and prosperity, May 2011 <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/high-tech/our-insights/internet-matters>

consistent with human rights principles should be an essential element in every grant, loan, technology transfer, or policy training program that MDBs facilitate.

Stable, secure, and open access to broadband internet is also crucial for the implementation and achievement of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to which all UN member countries committed to in late 2015. Recent data clearly demonstrate how all of the 17 SDGs heavily rely on ICTs to be successfully implemented.⁴

Supporting international development negotiations and commitments have recognized the same crucial role of ICTs. Those include the WSIS+10 outcomes⁵ that aim to foster more inclusive and development-oriented knowledge societies, recognizing the centrality of human rights to that goal, and the ITU's Connect 2020 Agenda for Global Telecommunication/ICT Development⁶ that promotes a vision where ICTs enable and accelerate socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable growth and development for everyone. We believe that such commitments are fully in line with our view and advocacy for the transformative power of high-speed networks to advance human development and human rights.

Within these agendas, we welcome initiatives such as Global Connect.⁷ Global Connect is an initiative seeded by the U.S. Department of State and supported by various countries and stakeholders, including civil society,⁸ which aims to bring internet connectivity to 1.5 billion people by 2020. We encourage Global Connect's partner countries to work together to prioritize internet connectivity across regional and functional practices in Multilateral Development Banks, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Inter-American Development Bank, to help prioritize the inclusion of ICTs in every country's development plans. One example of how this could be done is to leverage infrastructure projects by implementing "dig once" policies⁹ and other forms of coordinated infrastructure approaches.

Finally, we emphasize that the digital divide does not end once infrastructure loans are made and communications lines laid. Connectivity alone is not enough.¹⁰ The Internet has become an essential forum in the promotion and protection of human rights and development, but users are increasingly tracked, surveilled, and censored on insecure, restricted platforms that contribute to infringement of their basic rights. Network discrimination by companies acting as gatekeepers to content, or governments filtering and even shutting down services, decreases trust in the internet economy. To ensure long-term protection of rights online, net neutrality policies should be guaranteed wherever Internet infrastructure is being built out. The 13 "Necessary &

⁴ How Information and Communications Technology Can Achieve The Sustainable Development Goals, September 2015

<http://www.ericsson.com/res/docs/2015/ict-and-sdg-interim-report.pdf>

⁵ Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, December 2015 <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN95735.pdf>

⁶ Connect 2020 Agenda for Global Telecommunication/ICT Development <http://www.itu.int/en/connect2020/Pages/default.aspx>

⁷ Global Connect initiative <https://share.america.gov/globalconnect/>

⁸ Civil Society Statement on the Launch of the Global Connect Initiative, September 24, 2015 <http://bestbits.net/global-connect-initiative/>

⁹ See Section 8 of the MOBILE NOW Act (S. 2555), approved by the 114th U.S. Congress on March 3, 2016

http://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/8805bde8-408f-4b5e-a5fa-d867eed9d84f/146C427A5D018C04CE7E9C925D398163.mobile-now-act.pdf

¹⁰ David Kaye & Brett Solomon, Slate, "Merely Connecting the Developing World to the Internet Isn't Enough", October 13, 2015

http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2015/10/13/the_u_n_wants_to_connect_the_world_to_the_internet_that_s_not_enough.html

Proportionate” Principles,¹¹ which apply human rights to communications surveillance, should also be adopted and implemented as a framework for rights-respecting connectivity.

Considering the timely opportunity of the 2016 Spring Meetings of the MDBs, we present our commitment as public-interest organizations in supporting access to rights-respecting ICTs and broadband connectivity and urge you to adopt the **following commitments**:

- Integrate internet connectivity and access to digital technologies (“ICT infrastructure”) as key components of national development, borrowing, and investment strategies;
- Foster the growth of internet connectivity by urging national development agencies to prioritize digital access as an essential element of national infrastructure plans and investing sufficient funds for implementation;¹²
- Invest in increasing technical expertise in digital connectivity at national and local levels;
- Design ICT policies and practices based on respect for human rights online and offline, upholding network neutrality, the rule of law, and rights-respecting connectivity;
- Invest in internet connectivity based on a core understanding that the internet is a global resource and that it should be managed in the public interest as a democratic, secure, free, open, inclusive and pluralistic communication platform;
- Support public access facilities, such as libraries, which facilitate significant gains in connectivity and sustainable development;
- Support and invest in unlicensed and open spectrum, to expand connectivity within a community, to additional homes and institutions;
- Foster digital literacy, and enable and promote the development of locally relevant content, applications, and services as they are essential to widespread adoption of the internet and increase its social and economic value to people, families, and communities;
- Create enabling environments by adopting policies and strategies that focus not only on spurring connectivity, but also entrepreneurship, cross-border information flows, and open and competitive marketplaces;
- Invest in and adopt more effective policies that ensure: equitable and efficient access to radio spectrum; infrastructure sharing and lower barriers to entry for access providers

¹¹ The International Principles on the Application of Human Rights to Communications Surveillance (the “Necessary and Proportionate Principles” or “13 Principles”) <https://necessaryandproportionate.org/> =

¹² As the U.S. has done with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) <http://www.state.gov/e/rls/rmk/247375.htm>

with new technologies; better and targeted subsidies, direct investment in infrastructure roll out; and more transparent and accountable public-private partnerships.

We look forward to working with you on this important set of initiatives.

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, USA

(Carolina Rossini, VP International Policy and Strategy, Crossini@publicknowledge.org)

ACCESS NOW, Global

(Brett Solomon, Executive Director peter@accessnow.org)

ARTICLE 19, México and Central America Office

(Paulina Gutiérrez, Legal Program, paulina@article19.org)

ARTICLE 19, Brazil Office

(Laura Tresca, Policy Counsel, laura@article19.org)

FUNDACIÓN KARISMA

(Carolina Botero, Director, carobotero@karisma.org.co)

ACI-PARTICIPA, Honduras, Central America.

(Hedme Sierra-Castro, Protection Desk, hedme.sc@riseup.net)

WEB FOUNDATION, Global

(Anne Jellema, CEO, anne.jellema@webfoundation.org)

More endorsements at <http://bestbits.net/finance-ministers-global-connect/>