**APC ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS**

# IGF Brief – The importance of adopting human rights as the main theme for the IGF

*"[t]he internet vastly increases the capacity of individuals to enjoy their right to freedom of opinion and expression, including, access to information, which facilitates the exercise of other human rights".*
The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Frank La Rue (2011)

Today it seems clear that many, if not all, technical and policy decisions surrounding internet governance must contend with human rights in some way. Thus, we hold that internet governance is fundamentally a rights issue and therefore propose that human rights be the main theme of the Internet Governance Forum in 2012. Following is a summary of a few reasons why:

## 1. Human rights as guiding principles

Effective governance demands a set of guiding principles. Thankfully, an appropriate, legitimate and well-known set of principles has already been codified -- that is, the conventions on international human rights. Drawing from the rich tradition of human rights discourse, we can more effectively create coherent policy and better understand its impact. The IGF is a multi-stakeholder forum and, as the Chair's summaries noted, a rights-based approach is most effective to address many of the toughest questions surrounding internet governance.

## 2. Prominence of human rights in WSIS documents and internet governance discourse

WSIS Declaration of Principles: Article 3... "We also reaffirm that democracy, sustainable development, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as good governance at all levels are interdependent and mutually reinforcing."

Article 24... "The ability for all to access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge is essential"

IGF 2011 Chair's Summary:

- The importance of human rights, namely the freedom of expression and assembly for groups and individuals, was emphasized throughout the session and almost all debates returned to the central importance of human rights on the Internet.

- As noted throughout the meeting the period between the fifth and sixth meetings of the IGF has seen the tangible examples of the importance of human rights as an integral part of the Internet governance agenda.

- Summarising the main session on security, openness and privacy the chair noted the "importance of human rights and ensuring that individuals and groups maintain their freedom of expression and assembly".

In 2011, much of the discussion focused around access to the internet as a right. Although there is disagreement on whether access to the internet may be considered a right in itself, there is no question that it is a rights issue.  One in three 2011 IGF workshops, panels and related events dealt with human rights, making human rights the unofficial theme of the 2011 IGF. This demonstrates the need for more cross-pollination between business, law enforcement, civil society and the technical community, as well as the suitability of human rights as a unifying theme for the IGF as a whole.

## 3. Broad support from both governments and civil society

APC's proposal that human rights be the main theme of the IGF in 2012 received broad support from both governments and civil society. Among its proponents were the governments of Brazil and Sweden, as well as ISOC and the Gender Dynamic Coalition.

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