

How civil society can participate in the World Telecommunication Policy Forum (WTPF)

The World Telecommunication Policy Forum (WTPF) is a high-level international meeting organized every four years by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a specialized agency of the UN. It provides a venue for governments and Sector Members of the ITU (mostly from the telecoms and tech industries) to discuss key policy issues in today's telecommunications and information and communication technology (ICT) environment. The theme of the 2013 WTPF is internet-related public policy. Below is a description of the various ways that civil society may participate in the WTPF.

Public Attendants

Members of civil society may participate in the WTPF by applying to attend as public attendants. Public attendants should get access to most, if not all aspects of the WTPF, but as observers, they will not have the ability to make oral or written contributions to the Forum. The [programme](#) of the WTPF indicates that the meeting is divided between plenary sessions and working group sessions. At WCIT public attendants were only able to attend plenary sessions and select working group sessions, so it is possible that similar policies will be in place during WTPF.

Public attendants are required to have a proven interest in matters related to the WTPF, along with expertise and experience in international internet-related public policy matters. The form to apply to participate as a public attendant is available [here](#) and should be completed and submitted to sg-registration@itu.int. Due to limited room capacity, approval of requests from the public to attend the Forum will be based on the above-mentioned criteria and will be carried out on first come, first served basis. **The deadline to apply to attend the WTPF as a public attendant is 12 April 2013.**

National Delegation

Members of civil society can also participate in the WTPF through their national delegations. The level of participation for civil society within a national delegation is entirely the prerogative of each government. While some delegations may permit members of civil society to contribute to written submissions or make an oral intervention, this would be done on behalf of the national delegation, rather than as an independent representative of civil society.

While some governments may welcome civil society into their national delegations, often civil society participants will have to pay their own way or find travel support. **Registration for delegates is open until 16 May 2013, the day that the WTPF opens.** National contact points for the ITU are available [here](#).

Webcast/Remote Participation

At this point, it is not clear whether or not live webcasting and remote participation will be made available for civil society and the public. Remote participation will, however, be available for members of national delegations who indicate their preference for remote participation on their WTPF registration forms.

Special Guests

Members of civil society who participated in the Informal Experts Group (IEG) of the WTPF were invited by the Secretary General to participate in the IEG as “special guests.” As such, they are able to make oral and written contributions at the WTPF. However, since the IEG has now finished its work, only civil society members who previously joined the IEG can participate in this way.

Access and the Center for Democracy & Technology participated in the IEG and we invite comments and discussion so that we are better able to amplify the views of broader civil society. Please reach out to Deborah Brown (deborah [at] accessnow [dot] org) or Matthew Shears (mshears [at] cdt [dot] org). A number of members of civil society participated in their individual capacity as well. The full list of participants is available at <http://www.itu.int/md/S13-WTPF13IEG3-ADM-0002>

For more information about participation in WTPF, visit:

<http://www.itu.int/en/wtpf-13/Pages/participation.aspx>

For more on the WTPF, visit the Center for Democracy & Technology at <https://www.cdt.org/category/blogtags/wtpf> and Access’s WTPF primer at <https://www.accessnow.org/blog/2013/02/06/a-primer-for-the-un-world-telecommunication-policy-forum>.

To learn more about issues to watch at the WTPF, see CDT’s “World Telecommunication/ICT Policy Forum (WTPF) Issues to Watch” document at <https://www.cdt.org/files/file/analysisofWTPFreport.pdf>

APPENDIX I

21 February 2013

Open letter to ITU in ref. World Telecommunication Policy Forum (WTPF-13) preparation process

Dear Secretary-General Touré

Recalling the Tunis Agenda (Paragraph 35, in particular), we, the undersigned members of civil society, write to urge the Secretariat of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to honor previous commitments to ensure meaningful and sustainable civil society participation in the World Telecommunication Policy Forum (WTPF) in May 2013.

Civil society representatives in attendance at the WCIT in December welcomed the opportunity to meet with you. On that occasion, those representatives shared with you their concerns about several major challenges to participating in the WCIT, including the lack of any official standing for the public comments solicited prior to WCIT at the ITU's invitation, and the absence of mechanisms to support independent civil society participation.^[1] We appreciated that the comments from the Public Views and Opinions page were compiled in an information note to members of the ITU, where you [recognized](#) the “benefits from a greater civil society engagement at ITU” and committed “to take stock” and provide your membership with “some important recommendations” in line with the issues that civil society representatives raised.

Yet, as preparations are underway for the WTPF, civil society finds itself facing familiar barriers to participation:

1) We request the opportunity to submit public comments on the Secretary General's report and draft opinions, in a manner similar to the Public Views and Opinions page for the WCIT, with the guarantee that these opinions will be entered into the formal record. There is no formal mechanism for civil society to independently make further contributions to the WTPF. Though a few of the undersigned civil society representatives participated in the Informal Experts Group, which provided commentary on earlier drafts of the report and Member opinions, civil society should have the opportunity, along with other stakeholders, to make further contributions to the final draft of the report and opinions that will be released on March 1st. The commentary, analysis, and exchange of views that occurs in the months leading up to WTPF will be essential to stakeholders' preparations for the Forum.

2) We request, as this is a Forum for “multistakeholder consensus” and debate (and not a treaty conference), that civil society be accredited or recognized in some manner so as to be able to fully participate as equals in this important multistakeholder event. There are significant barriers to entry for meaningful participation in the May 2013 WTPF meeting. We recognize that you have on a number of occasions encouraged member states to form multistakeholder delegations, but as representatives of civil society have expressed to you previously, civil society participation in national delegations cannot substitute

for independent engagement.

Further, the process to apply to attend as a “public attendant” is unclear in so far as the criteria that will be applied to be public attendants will be judged against, or whether public attendants will have speaking rights at the meeting. We ask that the ITU clarify the requirements for participating as a public attendant, and create a mechanism so that civil society can express their views independent of national delegations, as was done during the WSIS process. We also request that the WTPF be live-streamed to allow for civil society and members of the public who do not have the resources to travel to Geneva to follow remotely (this is absolutely essential if there is a lack of space in the venue).

The undersigned civil society organisations look forward to being able to fully participate in and contribute to the WTPF, both in the run up and the event itself. As we saw during the WCIT, there is significant interest among the Internet-using public in the policy and governance discussions that will be conducted during WTPF. Civil society has much to offer: as was mentioned during the IEG meeting, civil society has significant technical, human rights, and policy expertise that it wishes to contribute to these important Internet policy-related discussions. We appreciate this dialogue and look forward to further constructive discussion.

Sincerely,

Access, International

Africa Information & Communication Technologies Alliance (AfICTA), Regional

ARTICLE 19, International

Association for Progressive Communications (APC), International

Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), Bangladesh

Eduardo Bertoni, Centro de Estudios en Libertad de Expresión y Acceso a la Información (CELE),

Universidad de Palermo, Argentina

Center for Technology and Society at Fundação Getulio Vargas (CTS/FGV), Brazil

Center for Democracy & Technology, United States

Consumers International, International

Fight for the Future, United States

Fundación Karisma, Colombia

Global Illuminators, International

Global Partners and Associates, International

Hiperderecho, Perú

iNGO European Media Platform, Regional

Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor (IDEC), Brazil

Instituto Nupef, Brazil

Internet Democracy Project, India

May First/People Link, International

ONG Derechos Digitales, Chile

OpenMedia International, International

Open Technology Institute, United States
Public Knowledge, United States

We encourage other civil society organizations and their members to endorse this statement. Please email wtpfsignon@gmail.com to add your support.

[1] This [letter](#) gained the support of over 60 members of civil society globally. Civil society organizations and individuals from around the world have echoed these requests for transparency and multistakeholder participation in numerous letters and petitions over the past several months. See, e.g., the [Protect Global Internet Freedom](#) statement; the International Trade Union Confederation [petition](#); the “[Best Bits](#)” [statement](#); the post-WCIT civil society [statement](#); and the post-WCIT [letter](#) from groups in Dubai.

APPENDIX II

26 March 2014

Re: Open letter to ITU in ref. World Telecommunication Policy Forum (WTPF-13) preparation process

I would like to thank you for your letter to the ITU Secretary General, expressing the views of the undersigned civil society Organizations, regarding the upcoming Fifth World Telecommunication/ICT Policy Forum (WTPF-2013).

The ITU acknowledges the contribution of Civil Society stakeholders before and during WCIT-12 and the Secretary General of the ITU is strongly committed, in line with Resolutions 101, 102 and 133 of the 2010 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, to exploring further ways and means of collaboration and cooperation with other relevant organizations involved in the development of IP-based networks and the future internet.

With regard to participation in WTPF-2013, the ITU Council, taking into consideration Resolution 2 (Rev. Guadalajara 2010), decided in its 2011 Session that this shall be open to Member States, Sector Members and small and medium-sized enterprises with attendance, as observers, by the public (Council 2011, Decision 562).

Throughout the one-year preparatory process towards the WTPF 2013, the Secretary General of the ITU, convened an Informal Expert Group (IEG), where all relevant stakeholders, including non-ITU members, contributed their unique perspective to the WTPF preparatory process, based on the roles and responsibilities that the stakeholders may have under Paragraph 35 of the WSIS Tunis Agenda (2005). The IEG produced, by consensus, the text of six Draft Opinions, covering a wide range of Internet-related public policy issues of significant relevance in today's world - for further discussion at WTPF 2013 in May.

Strongly acknowledging the multistakeholder character of this event, the ITU Secretariat addressed by email, prior to the 3rd IEG Meeting, a number of non-ITU members (Civil Society, Academia, NGOs and private sector), including many of the civil society organizations signing the letter in question, bringing to their attention the existing opportunity for active and constructive participation in the work and deliberations of the Informal Expert Group (IEG).

At the end of the final IEG Session, the Secretary General of the ITU invited to the Forum, as his special guests, all interested individuals who had contributed to the work of the Informal Expert Group (IEG), including Experts of entities from all stakeholder groups, many of whom are not members of the ITU. As special guests they will be allowed to submit information documents and can be given the floor by the Chairman.

Furthermore, apart from consistently urging Member States to adopt an inclusive policy in the formulation of their national delegations to the ITU, allowing all relevant national stakeholders to participate, which has already been followed by a number of delegations, the Secretary General of the ITU has also frequently encouraged interested non-ITU Members to join the ITU and thus contribute to ITU discussions in the capacity of Sector Members. I reiterate that call to civil society organizations to join as members of ITU which would render redundant these issues of participation in the future.

I hope that in the light of the current rules of procedures governing the WTPF, you will consider this as an important initiative toward broader participation in the Forum. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your interest in this event and for providing your valuable perspective which will be carefully taken into consideration with regards to our future work.

Kind regards,
Paul Conneally

Head of Communications and Partnership Promotion Division, ITU