

Assessing GNI, One Year On

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This fall the [Global Network Initiative \(GNI\)](#) [2] marks its first anniversary since launch in 2008. The GNI published a newsletter reflecting on its progress to date and outlining the organization's priorities for the coming year – read the whole thing [here](#) [3].

This year has been both challenging and rewarding. It has been an exercise in self-definition (through the Governance Charter drafting process) and capacity building (through our collaborative outreach and public dialogue efforts). Among the highlights from our first year:

- Developed the first stage of a Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) tool for application by a broad range of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) companies.
- Made progress on shared approaches to the implementation of the GNI Principles and responded to a number of critical issues and emerging events (for example, [Green Dam](#) [4]) by providing informed analysis and operational guidance to companies and other stakeholders.
- Hosted or participated in events designed to promote approaches consistent with the [GNI Principles](#) [5].
- Worked closely with other prominent organizations and [issued public statements](#) [6] to inform the policy dialogue on threats to freedom of expression and privacy.
- Actively reached out to prospective participants to grow our membership, including companies from across the ICT industry. We have initiated a new workstream to assess how our framework can be better refined for various sectors of the ICT industry.
- Built out GNI's organizational structure. The GNI is in the final stages of drafting a Governance Charter, recruiting an Executive Director, and establishing a board with representatives from each participating stakeholder group. (Psst!: Stay tuned for an announcement on this front in early 2010.)
- Prepared for independent assessment. Companies continued to implement their commitments under the GNI framework in preparation for assessment in 2011 while the organization, through the Charter drafting process, defined what an independent assessment looks like.

As an insider, I can say that the road to consensus within GNI is not always smooth. CDT convened one of the initial dialogues in 2006 that eventually led to the GNI. We also co-facilitated the GNI process for the two years leading to its formal launch, shepherding a diverse set of stakeholders trying to learn from each other and develop a standard for human rights corporate responsibility in the tech sector. At the end of this process last year, we had not only crafted a robust set Principles and Implementation Guidelines to help guide responsible company behavior, but we also emerged with a framework for governance and accountability for this nascent multistakeholder initiative and a strong platform for trust and collaborative action to advance freedom of expression and privacy all around the world.

The accomplishments of the past two years were only possible because the participants at the table made a commitment to put human rights at the center of the discussion. We came together because we recognized common cause and common threat: governments around the globe were enlisting technology companies in actions that restrict expression and infringe on the privacy of users, imperiling the potential of the Internet as a platform for speech, advocacy, and the promotion of democratic values and all human rights. GNI participants – company and non-company alike – recognized that ICT companies had the ability and the responsibility to push back against these pressures. By seeding the standard for corporate responsibility and providing an unprecedented platform for collaboration, the GNI aims to drive the policy and industry dialogue on what it means to advance freedom of expression and privacy in the digital age.

For all these reasons, CDT is heartened to see the GNI again entering a promising stage this coming year, with a Board of Directors, an Executive Director, and governance charter to be in place shortly. CDT's mission is to keep the Internet open, innovative, and free. It is collaborations like the GNI that truly magnify our impact and extend our reach.

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