

# ITU Discussions Must Be Opened

May 17, 2012

## Further Reading

Civil society organizations from around the world are requesting more transparency from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as it considers proposals that could give it power to regulate the Internet. This request is grounded in WSIS commitments to build a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society, which depends on the meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the regulation and management of the global ICT environment.

As we [noted](#) [1] earlier this year, the ITU's World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) will take place in December in Dubai. At this conference, the world's governments will address whether and how the ITU, a government-centric treaty body, will regulate policy and technical standards for the global Internet.

But the preparatory process for the WCIT is frustratingly opaque, especially for civil society stakeholders, with strong restrictions on access to documents and high barriers to ITU membership (including costs). Most Member States have not yet opened public processes to guide the development of their national positions or to seek input on their proposals, some of which present complex issues that go beyond merely technical interoperability of telecommunications infrastructure and may impact free expression, privacy, and other human rights.

Signed by civil society organizations and academics from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Egypt, the EU, India, Kenya, Pakistan, and the United States, the letter released today highlights these barriers to participation. As the letter notes,

The continued success of the information society depends on the full, equal, and meaningful participation of civil society stakeholders (alongside the private sector, the academic and technical community, and governments) in . . . both technical and public policy issues."

Sound ICT policy is best developed through truly open, multistakeholder processes that incorporate input from a diverse array of parties who may bring important perspectives and expertise to the table.

While the requests made in the letter may be quite exceptional for the ITU and its members under the ITU's current structure, we would point to another thing that has changed since the ITU's treaty was last negotiated: the worldwide protests over [SOPA in the US](#) [2] and [ACTA in EU](#) [3] make clear that a large, global civil society constituency has emerged that may be deeply suspicious about any process that appears to be a deal cut between powerful private interests behind closed doors. This suspicion is magnified if the regulatory decisions at issue could have long lasting impact on the information society and the ways in which ordinary citizens use the Internet. To ensure legitimacy of outcomes, governments may need to operate with a higher level of transparency and openness of process from here on out.

A copy of the letter is available [here](#) [4]. NGO Derechos Digitales has provided a [Spanish translation](#) [5] of the letter. Civil society organizations and academics are invited to join this call to address deficiencies in the WCIT process. For more information, contact [signon@cdt.org](mailto:signon@cdt.org) [6].



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- [1] <https://www.cdt.org/blogs/cynthia-wong/1603itu-eyes-internet-where-civil-society>
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