

WCIT Civil Society Briefing Leaves Many Questions Unanswered

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Earlier this week, the ITU Secretariat hosted a briefing for civil society organizations interested in the ITU's upcoming World Conference on International Telecommunications. Although the Secretariat's [official aim](#) [2] was to "provide an overview of the conference, the preparatory process, and some of the main principles and issues being discussed," concrete answers to these questions were few and far between.

What we did learn is that the ITU is putting the onus of civil society participation on the shoulders of Member States. The Secretariat repeatedly has said that civil society may participate through national consultations, or on national delegations, but this is only if Member States allow such participation. While this is fine and good for countries with a healthy civil sector and a commitment to multistakeholder governance, it is cold comfort to civil society in much of the world, where governments at best ignore their input and at worst target and harass them.

ITU representatives repeatedly assured participants that the ITU process is "open" and welcoming of civil society input, but it's clear that there's still a lot of daylight between our understandings of what an open and participatory process really looks like.

There was some discussion about whether civil society groups could participate at the WCIT by joining the ITU, as Sector Members, or by just showing up as private citizens. But it's still hard to pin down the details: what, exactly, are the costs of Sector Membership and attending the conference? What are the restrictions on participation for Sector Members? What kind of participation can civil society members who show up to the conference expect, given that the issue of opening up certain discussions to the public won't be voted on until the beginning of the conference? With just 52 days to the WCIT, it's frustrating that we still cannot get clear answers.

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