

Consensus Crumbles as Nations Split on Internet Governance

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Matthew Shears - Senior Internet Policy Expert, CDT

Washington-- The World Conference on International Telecommunications ended today with many delegates frustrated at the outcome.

After nearly two weeks of contentious deliberations, the US, UK, Canada, Denmark, Australia and Czech Republic have declared that they will not sign the newly revised treaty of the International Telecommunication Union. A growing list of countries, currently including Poland, Kenya, Costa Rica, Serbia, Sweden, the Philippines, Japan and the Netherlands have announced they must consult with stakeholders in their countries to decide whether they will sign.

A range of issues left many delegates dissatisfied. The US expressed serious concern about treaty provisions on cybersecurity and a Resolution explicitly committing to future ITU involvement in Internet policy. Several countries objected to a reference to spam, on the grounds that such a provision could open the door to limitations on content.

These same issues have posed challenges for advocates, experts, the Internet industry, and policymakers at other national and international forums that are more equipped to take on complex matters -- it's no surprise that a bureaucratic treaty deliberation process failed to arrive at real solutions to hard problems.

"This was a flawed process that failed to develop consensus on key questions for the future of global Internet policy-making," said Matthew Shears, CDT's Senior Internet Policy Expert, who is attending the conference as a member of the public. "The issues raised here in Dubai will keep recurring at forums around the world. All of those who are voicing such strong support for the multistakeholder model must prepare to work to protect and strengthen it in the coming years."

Certain countries came to the WCIT seeking a revised treaty that would legitimize greater control and surveillance of communications by governments. Looking ahead, some may try to use the treaty to defend their repressive practices, yet it contains no language that directly supports restrictions on the Internet.

The treaty remained high-level, using relatively vague language that compels countries to cooperate on complex policy issues, without offering specific solutions to technical challenges.

The WCIT also sought to acknowledge the legitimate concerns of many developing countries regarding ICT access, infrastructure, and information security concerns. Although some of these issues were addressed in the treaty, the process and outcome illustrated that the ITU is not well-equipped to resolve such wide-ranging policy challenges. Many of these important issues will arise at other forums, which may be better suited to resolve them.

CDT is concerned that the ITU has officially claimed a role in global Internet policy-making. The ITU remains a government-dominated body that offers limited opportunities for participation by civil society. Despite some concessions to advocates who urged the ITU to open their process to public view, the agency is far from transparent in its activities.

If the ITU is to assert a growing role in global Internet governance, it must evolve into a truly multistakeholder body that gives equal participation to advocates, users, and technical experts. We believe that Internet governance models must begin with this structure if they wish to develop

effective Internet policy solutions that promote development and protect the exercise of human rights online.

You can [click here](#) [1] for CDT's resource page that carries more detailed analysis and commentary on the ITU and the key proposals during WCIT.

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