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WTSA-24 Side Event

How ICT Standards Can Ensure Human Rights in Emerging Technologies

Summary and Outcomes

Event Details:

- **Date:** October 21, 2024
- **Time:** 1 PM – 2:30 PM
- **Location:** C1 Room, WTSA-24, New Delhi, India
- **Co-organizers:** European Commission, Czech Republic, France, OHCHR and ITU
- **Moderator:** **Ms. Wendy Teresa Goico Campagna**, Minister Counsellor for Economic and Cooperation Affairs at the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the UN & ITU Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) Coordinator

Introduction

This WTSA-24 side event addressed a critical question: How can ICT standards ensure that human rights are upheld in the era of new and emerging technologies? As technologies like AI, 5G, and the metaverse continue to evolve, their implications for human rights—ranging from privacy to freedom of expression—become increasingly significant. The event brought together a diverse panel of experts from governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to explore the intersection between ICT standards and human rights in the digital age.

Key Highlights and Discussions

1. Remarks from Moderator

The moderator, Ms Wendy Teresa Goico Campagna, emphasized the pivotal role of human rights in shaping the future of digital technologies and the importance of integrating human rights principles throughout the lifecycle of technical standards. She highlighted how standards can promote and protect rights such as privacy and freedom of expression but also warned of the risks if not carefully designed. Drawing parallels with the recently presented Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) statement and the Global Digital Compact, she stressed that technology development must be inclusive, human-centered, and focused on addressing the digital divide. Ms Goico Campagna underscored the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration in ensuring standards contribute to a just and equitable world, with input from various sectors, including governments, civil society, and the private sector. This collaborative approach, she noted, is essential for safeguarding human dignity as we navigate the era of emerging technologies. Finally, the moderator emphasized the importance of public-



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private partnerships and highlighted her government's policy in this regard, underscoring the value of collaboration for achieving shared goals and advancing mutual interests.

2. Opening Remarks from India, ITU, Czech Republic, and the European Commission

During the opening remarks, India representative Mr. Premjit Lal emphasized the critical role of new technologies like AI, 5G, and the metaverse in shaping humanity's future while addressing challenges such as cybercrime and digital rights. India's representative highlighted their commitment to embedding human rights into technology through privacy, data protection, and equity-focused legislation. The ITU representative, Dr. Bilel Jamoussi, reflected on the journey of raising awareness about the interplay between human rights and standards, stressing the need to consider human rights as a critical lens alongside technical accuracy and commercial viability in standards development. The Czech Republic represented by H.E. Eliška Žigová reiterated the Czech commitment to a human-centric and human rights-based approach to digital technologies. She stressed the importance of this approach from the cyber resilience perspective as well. The Ambassador praised the collaboration of diverse stakeholders in ensuring inclusivity in standardization processes, she highlighted the historic attendance of OHCHR representative at such an expert panel at WTSA. She praised the presence of private sector representatives which gives this process a practical angle. Finally, the European Commission representative Emilio Davila Gonzalez advocated for a process for embedding human rights into the design phase of technical standards, stressing that ICT standards are a powerful tool for safeguarding human rights and should be co-created with input from human rights experts.

3. Panel Discussions

John Omo (African Telecommunication Union): Mr. Omo emphasized that technology itself is not the issue, but rather the human biases and prejudices embedded in its design and implementation. He raised concerns about the universality of standards, arguing that global standards often fail to account for local cultural contexts, particularly in Africa, which remains a net importer of technology. Mr. Omo stressed that many technical standards are created with external assumptions about what is right or wrong, often leading to the exclusion of African perspectives. He advocated for more African collaboration in standardization efforts, so that African countries can present a unified voice in international discussions. He highlighted the need for standards that protect vulnerable groups, ensure accessibility, and guard against the weaponization of standardization for political purposes. Additionally, Mr. Omo urged for greater African participation in global standard-setting forums to ensure that the continent's interests and unique challenges are considered.

Michel Oliveira de Souza (OHCHR): Mr. de Souza highlighted the importance of bridging the gap between human rights and technical standard-setting processes. He referenced the OHCHR's report on this topic, which provides a landscape of how technical standards can both facilitate and violate human rights. Michel emphasized the need to ensure that technical standards enhance human rights, citing examples like accessibility and non-discrimination in AI systems. He also underscored the responsibilities of states, businesses, and standard-setting organizations to respect and protect human rights, with businesses guided by the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. He



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concluded by discussing the B-Tech Project, which provides guidance and resources to the implementation of these principles to the tech sector, ensuring that business respect human rights in all of their processes.

Per Fröjd (Ericsson): Mr. Fröjd emphasized the critical role of the private sector, that while fostering innovation, to also embed human rights protections into the design and deployment of new technologies like AI and 5G. He highlighted that companies must adopt frameworks, such as privacy-by-design and trustworthy AI, which ensure technologies are safe, explainable, fair, and transparent from the outset. He also stressed the importance of conducting proactive risk assessments to identify human rights risks at every stage, including potential misuse by customers. Additionally, he advocated for Standards Development Organizations (SDOs) to assess both positive and negative human rights impacts of proposed standards, while incorporating diverse perspectives to mitigate risks such as privacy violations and algorithmic bias. Fröjd concluded by emphasizing the importance of openness, transparency, and inclusivity in the standardization process.

Raquel Renno Nunes (Article 19, Freedom Online Coalition): Ms Renno Nunes emphasized the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in the development of technical standards, particularly ensuring the inclusion of civil society and marginalized communities. She highlighted that poorly designed standards can exacerbate the digital divide, especially for underserved populations, and stressed the need for human rights-centered standards to ensure equity, inclusion, and data privacy. Ms Renno Nunes echoed calls to ensure that regulatory measures and protocol proposals do not compromise an open and interoperable Internet; continue their strong support for an open and transparent model for standard-development based on pluralistic, voluntary, inclusive, bottom-up participation by all stakeholders. Additionally, she emphasized empowering civil society with the necessary skills and knowledge to actively participate in standardization, ensuring that standards reflect the needs of all, not just a privileged few.

Olivier Alais (ITU/TSB): Mr. Alais emphasized the pivotal role of the ITU in shaping global technical standards that not only address technical specifications but also protect human rights, such as privacy, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination. He highlighted ITU's collaboration with governments, industry leaders, and academic institutions, ensuring inclusive and robust standards development. Mr. Alais pointed to ITU's existing efforts in areas like sustainable e-waste management and telehealth accessibility as examples of embedding human rights in its work. He discussed initiatives such as the "Bridging the Standardization Gap" initiative, which aims to ensure broader participation from developing countries. He also stressed the need for future steps, including capacity-building programs, multidisciplinary participation, and deeper partnerships with organizations like OHCHR to translate human rights into actionable technical standards. Ultimately, Mr. Alais reaffirmed ITU's work to consider human rights while navigating emerging technologies such as AI, digital identity, and the metaverse.

Didier Berthoumieux (Nokia): Mr. Berthoumieux highlighted the internal human rights practices within his organization, the code of conduct that promotes inclusivity, non-discrimination,



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environment of mutual respect, compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Ombuds program. Mr. Berthoumieux also elaborated on their business processes, including a human rights-focused due diligence process for sales, using external assessments to ensure that their technologies are not misused, and highlighted the active participation of Nokia to the Global Network Initiative. He emphasized the importance of privacy, security, and lawful interception, while pointing out challenges related to net neutrality and data encryption, and the future issues on “Responsible Artificial Intelligence. Mr. Berthoumieux concluded by underscoring the need for regular risk analysis for emerging technologies, noting that while standards cannot guarantee human rights, they are essential tools for mitigating risks and safeguarding rights.

Kwame Baah Acheamfuor (Ghana): Kwame Baah Acheamfuor highlighted the challenges faced by developing countries in the global standardization process, particularly the lack of representation due to financial and logistical constraints. He emphasized the importance of virtual participation to allow more countries to contribute to study groups and standards development. Mr. Acheamfuor stressed the need for inclusivity in standards, urging that the perspectives of both producer and consumer markets be considered, as well as the specific needs of marginalized communities, including people with disabilities. He also called for deeper technical collaborations between developing and developed countries, particularly in areas like laboratory testing, to ensure that developing nations have access to the resources needed to actively participate in the standards development process.

4. Closing Remarks

The event concluded with remarks from Ambassador Eric Fournier of France illustrated the power of emerging technologies in promoting human rights by comparing the story of 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, who championed freedom of thought in Amsterdam, with the modern-day fight for freedom by the women of Iran. He highlighted how, just as Spinoza used spectacles, then a cutting-edge technology, to access knowledge, today’s protesters use mobile phones to broadcast their struggle for freedom and human rights to the world. Mr. Fournier emphasized that emerging technologies like mobile phones are powerful tools for promoting human rights, enhancing freedom of speech and expression across the globe.

Key Outcomes and Next Steps

1. **Inclusion of Human Rights in Standard Development:** A key outcome from the event was the recognition of the need to embed human rights considerations from the earliest stages of technical standards development. This includes issues such as ensuring privacy, security, non-discrimination, accessibility, and other human rights, especially for vulnerable groups and marginalized communities.
2. **Capacity Building and Multi-Stakeholder Participation and Collaboration:** Several speakers stressed the importance of capacity-building programs to equip stakeholders, particularly from developing countries, with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in standardization



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- processes. Additionally, fostering multi-stakeholder participation and collaboration between governments, civil society, the private sector, and standard-setting organizations was identified as essential for inclusive and representative standardization.
3. **Virtual Participation for Inclusivity:** The need for increased virtual participation in standardization processes was emphasized, particularly as a solution to the financial and logistical constraints faced by many developing countries. This would ensure broader and more equitable representation in global standards development.
 4. **Risk Analysis for Emerging Technologies and Adequate Human Rights Due Diligence Processes:** Participants highlighted the need for continuous risk analysis as new technologies emerge. By identifying and assessing both the positive and negative human rights impacts of these technologies with human rights due diligence, standards can be developed to mitigate risks and safeguard human rights.
 5. **Collaboration with Human Rights Organizations:** Participants pointed out the need of involvement of human rights experts in the standardization process. Strengthening partnerships with organizations such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was identified as a necessary step to translate human rights principles into actionable technical standards. This collaboration can ensure that human rights are not only considered but embedded into the design and implementation of standards.

Conclusion

The event reinforced the critical link between technical standards and human rights in the digital age. As emerging technologies like AI, 5G, 6G and the metaverse continue to evolve, it is imperative that human rights considerations are integrated into the standardization process to ensure technology serves all people. The discussions underscored that technical standards can either promote or hinder human rights, depending on their design and implementation. Moving forward, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, increasing participation from developing countries, and continuously assessing the human rights impacts of emerging technologies will be crucial in shaping a fair and inclusive digital future. The ITU and other stakeholders are committed to advancing this agenda, ensuring that technology becomes a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion.

Useful links

Event web page:

<https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/Workshops-and-Seminars/2024/1021/Pages/default.aspx>

Video recording:

<https://www.itu.int/webcast/archive/t2024wtsa#video>