Freedom Online Coalition
Strategy & Coordination Meeting, March 2023

27-28 March | Washington, D.C.

The first FOC Strategy and Coordination Meeting under the US Chairship took place from 27 to 28 March and included hybrid participation from 25 FOC Members, 1 Observer, 25 FOC Advisory Network Members, and 23 external stakeholders (Day 2).

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Day 1, Monday 27 March

Friends of the Chair Meeting
9:00 - 9:30 EDT
Location: White House, Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Participants: Chair, Friends of the Chair/ Support Unit (SU)
Format: Hybrid

Ahead of the broader Strategy and Coordination Meeting (SCM), and following discussions from the March Friends of the Chair (FotC) Monthly Meeting, Members gathered to further discuss the proposed Stockholm Terms of Reference (ToR) amendments. The US provided the rationale for the proposed amendments, noting their aim to strengthen the Coalition's operations and make it more agile in an effort to address the FOC's recent, and potential future, growth. Further, the FotC discussed developing a drafting process for FotC Members to help update the ToR, with plans to have an initial draft of the document ready to share with the broader Coalition by summer 2023.

FOC Member Meeting
9:45 - 11:30 EDT
Location: White House, Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Participants: FOC/ Observers/ SU
Format: Hybrid

During the second meeting of the day, the FOC Support Unit (SU) provided housekeeping updates, as well as progress updates on the implementation of the Program of Action 2023, with highlights of upcoming activities. Following these updates, participants heard remarks from US government representatives Rob Berschinski, Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Senior Director for Democracy and Human Rights, and Maher Bitar, Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Senior Director for Intelligence on the White House administration's efforts around technology and democracy, and noted the release of an Executive Order prohibiting the operational use of commercial spyware by the US government. The participants proceeded to focus on priority discussion topics, including the proposed amendments to the FOC Stockholm ToR, and a way forward for ensuring the document reflects the Coalition's current and future operations; and the revitalised Funding Coordination Group (FCG), which is envisioned as a home for activities related to donor coordination. FOC Members then discussed diplomatic coordination, with an emphasis on FOC engagement in ongoing multilateral processes and fora, including the Global Digital Compact, the UN Human Rights Council, and UNESCO, as well as the need to convene capital-level with local representatives in the FOC's diplomatic networks and embassies around the world to ensure more efficient and timely coordination and action on priority policy issues.

Action>> **FOC Members are invited to express interest to join the Funding Coordination Group by COB Thursday, 20 April.**

Action >> **Members to share thoughts and expectations on FOC engagement in diplomatic networks in Geneva, Paris, and New York with the Support Unit.**

FOC Advisory Network (FOC-AN) Meeting
10:30 - 11:30 EDT
Location: White House, Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Participants: FOC-AN/SU
Format: Hybrid

In the FOC-AN Meeting, FOC-AN Members discussed efforts to diversify FOC membership; content moderation and censorship; FOC engagement with supranational organisations; the FOC FCG and opportunities for FOC-AN engagement around donor coordination; and potential FOC Member accountability mechanisms in relation to censorship, surveillance, shutdowns, and responsible handling of data. Finally, Johnny Walsh, USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator, and Tim Maurer, White House National Security Council Director for Technology and Democracy provided a short briefing on the White House administration's efforts around technology and democracy, and noted the release of an Executive Order prohibiting the operational use of commercial spyware by the US government.

Working Lunch - Sub-Entity Presentations
12:30 - 13:20 EDT
Location: Atlantic Council
Participants: FOC/ Observers/ FOC-AN/ SU
Format: Hybrid

Scott Busby, US Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, welcomed the Coalition and highlighted the various opportunities for collaboration the FOC offered during the SCM. FOC sub-entity leads then presented their progress in implementing the Program of Action 2023, and plans for upcoming activities for the rest of the year.

The Task Force on Digital Equality, led by Ghana and FOC-AN Members, Association for Progressive Communications, Media Rights Agenda, and Michael Samway (individual capacity), provided a brief background about their mandate and highlighted plans to develop a glossary to contribute to a common understanding of what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean in the digital environment, as well as plans to prepare a repository of good practices carried out by FOC countries that address digital divides.

The Silicon Valley Working Group, led by Canada, followed, noting their foundation in ensuring a learning platform where governments and the technology sector can engage. In 2023, the Group will focus on developing side-events with the aim to raise FOC awareness in various relevant spaces, noting in particular their recent event hosted on the margins of the Game Developers Conference in March, which brought together governments and industry representatives in an effort to foster multistakeholder dialogue.

The Task Force on Internet Shutdowns, led by the UK and FOC-AN Members Access Now and the Global Network Initiative, emphasised their four lines of effort and corresponding activities. These include knowledge-sharing through bi-monthly informational meetings and newsletters; preventative and reactive responding to Internet shutdowns enabled through mapping countries of concerns and issuing statements that highlight concerns; shifting global norms by advancing language against shutdowns in multilateral processes; and improving data collection and presentation tools on Internet shutdowns. The Task Force encouraged the Coalition to join learning calls and other information-sharing opportunities.

The Task Force on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, led by Germany, highlighted their previous focus in 2022 on the human rights risks of algorithms, and noted two main areas in 2023: the abuse of artificial intelligence by governments which leads to human rights violations; and building greater consensus on agreed upon high-level principles and norms related to artificial intelligence.

Finally, Denmark announced plans to establish a new Task Force on Trustworthy Information Online that seeks to work toward cultivating a healthy online information ecosystem. The Task Force would be established from an Action Coalition of the same name from Denmark's Tech for Democracy.

Atlantic Council DFR Lab Public Session
13:30 - 14:30 EDT
Location: Atlantic Council
Participants: FOC/ Observers/ FOC-AN/ Invited Participants/ SU
Format: Hybrid

Wendy Sherman, US Deputy Secretary of State provided opening remarks, highlighting the significant role that digital technologies play in everyday life, and underscoring the US and FOC's commitment to creating a digital environment that expands people's ability to exercise their human rights. Deputy Secretary Sherman further emphasised the FOC must remain an essential vehicle to keep the digital space safe, open, interoperable, secure, and reliable. The session then turned to a panel discussion, moderated by the Atlantic Council, with panellists representing Derechos Digitales, Paradigm Initiative, and Cloudflare to discuss the state of play in the digital technology space, to identify the opportunities and challenges of technology, and to reflect on the role of the FOC in the digital environment. Panellists emphasised the significant potential for positive and negative impact that technology plays in all aspects of life, and underscored that key challenges in the digital technology space will manifest differently depending on the context. Panellists further highlighted the role of the FOC in acting as a link for discussions between governments, civil society, and industry at the intersection of technology and human rights. To view the session recording and Atlantic Council's summary of remarks, visit the following links: session recording, summary of remarks.

FOC and FOC-AN Joint Roundtable
14:45 - 16:00 EDT
Location: Atlantic Council
Participants: FOC/ Observers/ FOC-AN/SU
Format: Hybrid

The Joint Roundtable focused on two key discussion items: (1) connecting with supranational and regional organisations, and (2) identifying thematic goals for the FOC to focus on over the next three years to ensure continuity between Chairs. Questions around types of engagement models and how to prioritise outreach with supranational and regional organisations were raised, as well as reflections on the challenges of engaging with such organisations and possible suggestions to mitigate them. The FOC-AN and the US noted there is significant overlap between the suggested thematic goals and what is currently in the Program of Action 2023, indicating the FOC is moving in the right direction. FOC and FOC-AN Members discussed the details of various thematic issues relevant to the FOC and its goals such as preserving interoperability, surveillance, and access to data, and underscored the importance of mainstreaming diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the Coalition's thematic goals.

Action>> **FOC Members which are part of a supranational organisation are invited to volunteer to share information with the FOC on ongoing developments and processes in their respective organisation, as well as overlap with the FOC's work, where applicable, by EOD Friday, 28 April.**

Summit For Democracy Technology Cohort Briefing
16:15 - 17:15 EDT
Location: Atlantic Council
Participants: FOC/ Observers/ FOC-AN/ SU
Format: Hybrid

Kanbar Bor, U.K Deputy Director of Democratic Governance and Media Freedom, offered opening remarks, highlighting the thematic and leadership connections between the Tech Cohort and the FOC Task Force on Internet Shutdown with an interest in ensuring synergy between the two. Tech Cohort co-Leads, UK, Estonia, and Access Now, provided context about the Summit for Democracy (S4D) Technology Cohort, and noted they produced S4D deliverables under the following three areas of focus: Internet shutdowns, harnessing the potential

of technology and data for the benefit of open democratic societies, and technology for good governance, for the purpose of creating tools and resources for the external community to proliferate the use of technology for democratic and rights-respecting outputs. A noted opportunity to synergise with the FOC included reference to a portal the Cohort developed that consolidates information on Internet shutdowns in a way that is accessible to policymakers and the public, encouraging the FOC to leverage the information and personal impact stories in key policy fora and provide feedback to strengthen the resource. The Tech Cohort further noted they are exploring how they can transfer and sustain the work of the Tech Cohort through the FOC.

Day 2, Tuesday 28 March

Building an Inclusive, Multistakeholder Digital Future
9:00 - 11:00 EDT
Location: New America
Participants: FOC/ Observers/ FOC-AN/ Invited Participants/ SU
Format: Hybrid

Co-organised by Global Partners Digital (GPD), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and US Agency for International Development (USAID), the session provided an opportunity to discuss how inclusion can foster Internet freedom and democracy. The session opened with welcome remarks from Vera Zakem, Chief Digital Democracy and Rights Officer at USAID, highlighting the Advancing Digital Democracy initiative, as well as the commitments they have made to foster an inclusive digital age and facilitate coordination between founders in the digital technology space. The following discussion explored how inclusion is being mainstreamed across the FOC's mechanisms, with speakers from the FOC-AN and the Task Force on Digital Equality highlighting key achievements, such as translating joint statements into various languages and holding learning calls on gendered disinformation and online gender-based violence to build the capacity of FOC members on the gendered implications of digital technologies. Further, IDRC and USAID outlined plans to revitalise the FCG and discussed ongoing work to inform this activity through an inclusive stakeholder mapping of key funders in the digital democracy space and the development of donor principles for the digital age. Participants later broke into groups to discuss how inclusion could be advanced across the FOC and to identify the type of data/ findings from the stakeholder mapping that would be most helpful for governments and civil society actors.

Action>> **Participants are invited to submit additional written feedback to the Support Unit by Thursday, 20 April on the break-out room questions shared during the session.**

Denmark and EU Launch of the Digital Democracy Initiative (DDI)
11:00 - 12:00 EDT
Location: New America
Participants: FOC/ Observers/ FOC-AN/ Invited Participants/ SU
Format: Hybrid

The DDI was introduced by H.E Anne-Marie Larsen, Denmark's Tech Ambassador, who noted ongoing democratic challenges as a result of new and existing technologies, and the need to ensure initiatives to address these challenges facilitate inclusive multistakeholder discussions and action. The launch featured remarks from Dan Jørgensen, Denmark's Minister for Development Cooperation and Global Climate Policy, Jutta Urpilainen, the EU-Commissioner for International Partnerships, and Helen Eduards, Sweden's Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Speakers emphasised the importance of collaborating with and building the resilience of civil society activists to support the use of digital technologies for democratic, rights-respecting ends. The session also featured a discussion with panellists from CIVICUS, One More Percent, and Digital Defenders Partnership to discuss the challenges that civil society face, highlighting in particular how human rights violations offline are further exacerbated by authoritarian use of digital technologies. Panellists emphasised the need to continue

investing in civil society, ensure that relevant digital tools available in the global North are available to people and groups in the global South, and recognise that digital tools are both an opportunity for accountability and a threat to the safety of human rights defenders.

Annex I: Agenda (Abridged)

Day 1 Monday, 27 March

Time	Topic	Attendance
9.00	**Friends of the Chair Meeting**	Friends of the Chair
9.30	Coffee Break	All
9.45	**FOC Strategy & Coordination Meeting**	FOC Members FOC Observers
10.30	**FOC Advisory Network Meeting**	FOC-AN Members
11.30	Working Lunch	All
13.30	**Atlantic Council DFRLab Public Session:** Live from the Freedom Online Coalition: How the FOC works for people around the world	All
14.30	Coffee Break *(15 mins)*	All
14.45	**FOC & FOC-AN Joint Roundtable Meeting**	FOC / FOC-AN Members FOC Observers
16.00	Coffee Break *(15 mins)*	All
16.15	**Summit For Democracy Technology Cohort Briefing**	All
17.15	End of Day 1	

Day 2 Tuesday, 28 March *'Building an Inclusive, Multistakeholder Digital Future'*

Time	Details	
9.00	**Welcome, introductions, and setting the scene**	All/ Invited Participants
9.45	**Building an Action Plan: Integrating the inclusion agenda across and through the FOC**	All/ Invited Participants
10.20	**Aligning Global Multistakeholder Efforts on Policy and Programming**	All/ Invited Participants
11.00	**Denmark and EU Launch of the Digital Democracy Initiative**	All/ Invited Participants
12.00	End of Day 2	