

Just Net Coalition
Statement on the Outcome Statement
UNESCO's "Connecting the Dots" conference
4 March 2015

The Just Net Coalition¹ (JNC) comprises several dozen civil society organisations and individuals from different regions globally, concerned with issues of Internet governance, from the perspective of all human rights, including democracy and economic and social justice.

We refer to:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/outcome_document.pdf

We request that this statement be annexed to that outcome document (or be referenced in it with the weblink http://www.justnetcoalition.org/JNC_response_UNESCO_connecting-the-dots).

We fully welcome a greater role for UNESCO in global Internet Governance affairs, and the present effort is commendable in this regard. Internet governance is most of all about information, knowledge and communication and these are key areas of UNESCO's remit. We especially recall the very important progressive role that UNESCO has played historically in these areas and particularly UNESCO's exemplary efforts in support of "communication rights" It will indeed be extremely valuable, and quite appropriate for UNESCO to give a new direction and lead in this area such that the Internet is seen within a "communication rights" context as a priority before matters of trade and security.

We do however regret that UNESCO has not taken its typically high normative stance as might be expected, in relation to the specific issues under discussion in this conference. Rather, it has pursued what appears to be a very cautious agenda in the conference Outcome Document. It must be noted that the larger Internet Study, in its current draft, has certain very commendable elements, that, if pursued, can open new and progressive directions for global IG. However, for some reason which is not made clear, the Outcome Document has failed to capture certain of the most significant elements of the Internet study, and is even more cautious than the study itself. The world today requires a new collective visioning of the Internet in terms of rights - based first of all on communication rights. It is such new directions and leadership that we had hoped for, and for which we still hope, that UNESCO might provide.

In this context, we are quite disappointed that while the text emphasizes certain civil and political rights and also mentions the relevant human rights instruments it fails to acknowledge adequately the importance of economic and social rights in the context of the Internet and its governance, and does not mention in the preamble to the document, the UN Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. Just two days ago, on 2 March, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned us against cherry picking human rights². Human rights are indivisible and must all be protected and enforced. It is

¹ <http://justnetcoalition.org>

² Opening speech: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15628&LangID=E>



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not the case that social, economic and cultural rights are any less important in the context of the Internet than civil and political rights, which of course are very important. However, the Outcome Document it appears, will make us believe that this is the case, and this is extremely unfortunate.

We are unable to understand the resistance to inclusion of social, economic and cultural rights in such a document. If multistakeholder spaces, where we understand that certain problematic vetoes would apply, become spaces where such cherry-picking of rights would occur to the detriment of social, economic and cultural rights; it indicates very problematic directions in which our governance systems are headed.

Lastly, on a connected note, we are perhaps even more surprised that despite our repeated requests, and alternative formulations³, the term, and with it the normative positioning of 'democratic' practice, was not included in the text in the form of a key Internet governance principle. This despite the fact that this basic principle is a fundamental human right enshrined in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Article 25 of the International Covenant on Social and Political Rights. The sole reason that was publicly provided against this inclusion was that “it is ill-defined and adds baggage”. In our view, democracy is well defined in the relevant human rights instruments cited above, and it does not “add baggage”; it empowers people and societies and is fundamental to the collective creation of a just and humane world.

We cannot have an Internet that benefits all, equitably, unless its governance is democratic. For such an important document to exclude the mention of 'democratic' with regard to the Internet and its governance, is not acceptable.

As we said, this is a very important opportunity for UNESCO to take an important role in global Internet Governance. However, to do this UNESCO will need to have the bravery of its mandate and traditions and within its grand traditions of visionary leadership accept its responsibility for normative development in this area. It must also directly embrace and accept its advocacy role concerning the relevance of social, economic and cultural rights with regard to the Internet and its governance. Lastly, democratic governance and development of the Internet is key, and must be a central priority of all those who value justice and equality. The Internet has to be developed by all the people together, in equitable ways, including through their representative and where necessary new, and technology enabled, institutions playing the appropriate roles in this regard.

For the above reasons, we formally object to the approval of the Outcome Statement. The document thus cannot be considered to have been approved by consensus among the meeting participants since a formal objection has been raised.

³ For example, adding at the end of 1.5 “in its democratic governance”, so that the clause would read “Support the Internet Universality principles (ROAM) that promote a Human-Rights based, Open Internet Accessible to all and characterized by Multi-Stakeholder participation in its democratic governance”.