



The Freedom Online Coalition

The Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) is an intergovernmental coalition that was established at the inaugural Freedom Online Conference in The Hague, the Netherlands, on December 8th and 9th 2011. As indicated in its founding declaration, the FOC is committed to advancing internet freedom – free expression, association, assembly, and privacy online - worldwide. FOC member states are committed to work together diplomatically to voice concern over measures to restrict internet freedom and support those individuals whose human rights online are curtailed.

Currently, the Freedom Online Coalition consists of Austria, Canada, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Kenya, Latvia, the Republic of Maldives, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Since 2011, the Coalition has grown from 15 initial members to 22 today.

Since its inception, members of the Coalition have gathered informally as governments and in consultation with other stakeholders at numerous conferences and intergovernmental meetings relevant to internet freedom as well as in specific countries, to coordinate viewpoints, share relevant information, and discuss strategies to advance an open internet in each context. Many FOC meetings took place in the past year, in forums ranging from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), to the United Nations Human Rights Council, to the Internet Governance Forum and the Stockholm Internet Forum. A good example of joint action since the founding of the Coalition was coordination among FOC members during the ITU WCIT meeting, December 2012, in Dubai and a joint statement at the OSCE Internet Freedom conference in Vienna, February 2013.

In addition to these meetings, the FOC hosts annual multi-stakeholder conferences that aim to deepen the discussions on how freedom of expression on the internet is helping to promote social, cultural and economic development. After the inaugural conference in The Hague, the FOC members formally met again in Nairobi in September 2012, when the government of Kenya hosted the second major conference, which attracted over 450 participants from a range of stakeholder groups from across the world. Tunisia organised the third Freedom Online conference in Tunis, in June 2013, which focussed on three specific themes: “Towards an internet free and secure”, “Digital development and openness”, and “Supporting privacy and transparency online”. The conference attracted over 500 participants and provided a multi-stakeholder platform to discuss issues of internet freedom with a particular regional focus on the Middle East and North Africa. FOC members came to Tunis to engage with other governments; regional organisations; international institutions; civil society and the private sector, to reinforce the Coalition’s efforts in this regard.

Beyond being just one-off events, the FOC conferences also have a strong capacity building element and act as springboard for other valuable initiatives that strengthen civil society in this field. For instance in Tunis, a two-day training took place for bloggers, hackers, human rights defenders, activists, and government officials. At the FOC conference in Nairobi, the Digital Defenders Partnership was launched to support innovative solutions to the protection of bloggers and online activists in danger, and to provide quick support in response to a range of emerging threats to internet freedom. The Partnership is managed by Hivos and funded through financial support of the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia, Czech Republic and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. The Partnership invests in organisations and individuals working on solutions to digital threats faced by journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders.

The fourth Freedom Online conference will be held in Tallinn in the spring of 2014, hosted by the Estonian government. Looking forward to Tallinn, FOC members will continue the dialogue initiated in Tunis through the establishment of working groups on key issues of concern. Additionally, the FOC will establish a mechanism of regular communication with other stakeholders throughout the year. At a time when internet policy issues have become one of the most intensely discussed international issue, the Coalition has a vital role to play in promoting the values of democracy and human rights online.