



HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES FOR CONNECTIVITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Internet connectivity is essential for economic, social, cultural, political, and civic participation in the digital age. For the benefits of information and communications technologies to spread equitably and freely, connectivity must occur within a human rights framework.

Our goal in developing the Principles is to prevent, mitigate, and remedy human rights harms that arise in development projects to build internet infrastructure, connect the world to the internet, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) using information and communications technologies (ICTs).¹ Since more than four billion people lack access to the internet, the largest stakeholder group in these efforts remains unconnected, likely marginalized, rarely consulted, and dangerously at risk of being left behind in the digital age. Our process is open to input and innovation to support the broadest possible participation.

The Principles advanced in this draft are grounded in international human rights law and norms; are consistent with the SDGs as well as development best practices; and are designed to help guide initiatives to increase connectivity to the global internet. We use the term “connectivity” here in recognition of the many programs that aim to spur infrastructure investment and bring all people online by 2020, such as the Global Connect Initiative,² Connect the World,³ and Connect 2020.⁴ We intend the term to encompass efforts to provide affordable access to infrastructure, including public access points, as well as policy initiatives and capacity-building programs to enable development and the free and safe exercise of human rights online.

These Principles do not aim to supplant, but rather to build on and adapt, such foundational documents as the Internet Rights and Principles Coalition (IRPC) Charter of Human Rights and Principles for the Internet,⁵ the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Internet Rights Charter,⁶ the UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights,⁷ and the Council of Europe Guide to Human Rights for Internet Users.⁸ They are intended to inform financial institution safeguards like the Overseas Private Investment Corporation’s Environmental and Social Policy Statement.⁹

1. <http://www.globalgoals.org/#the-goals>

2. <https://share.america.gov/globalconnect>

3. <http://connecttheworld.one.org>

4. <http://www.itu.int/en/connect2020/Pages/default.aspx>

5. <http://internetrightsandprinciples.org/site>

6. <https://www.apc.org/node/5677#1>

7. <https://business-humanrights.org/en/un-guiding-principles>

8. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/internet-users-rights/guide>

9. https://www.opic.gov/sites/default/files/consolidated_esps.pdf

These Principles guide stakeholders on building protections for human rights into development programs, by design:

1 Assessments of connectivity investments must include an evaluation of the impact on human rights. Connectivity, development, and human rights are interdependent, and should not be considered in isolation. Those evaluating connectivity investments for development must consider the impact on political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

2 Investment in infrastructure should be deployed hand-in-hand with human rights-based capacity building, public access points, and skills development. To bridge the gender digital divide and other persistent inequalities will require more than simply extending infrastructure; inclusive partnerships are vital for unlocking the full benefits of connectivity for a population.

3 Investors should support connectivity for development that respects human rights. Human rights apply online just as they do offline. Participation in connectivity initiatives should be conditioned on demonstrated respect for human rights, applicable before, during, and after completion of the project. To ensure sustainability of connectivity projects and avoid partial execution of investments, conditions should be reached through cooperative strategies.

4 Investors should promote affordable and open access to the whole internet. The internet is a global resource that must remain open and affordable. Affordability should be set based on local needs and realities. Public, aid, and development-targeted funding should not enable private actors to create walled gardens or employ business models that fail to offer users affordable access to the global internet.

5 Investors should seek to facilitate freedom of expression through resilient and robust networks that reach marginalized and vulnerable communities. The law should promote wide access to content, stable and resilient networks, and sustainable systems.

6 Connectivity investments for development must respect privacy, which is essential for the internet economy. Privacy impact evaluations and technical, legal, and policy due diligence should be carried out on connectivity initiatives before deployment.

7 Projects for connectivity should be undertaken using open, transparent, and inclusive processes. Corruption is an obstacle to human rights and development. All public and private institutions involved in connectivity projects must enable access to information, build trust with stakeholders, and ensure accountability for funding.

8 Connectivity initiatives should remain open to civil society and community participation throughout the life of the project. Ensuring safe and secure access requires international collaboration, as well as local organizing, based on a multistakeholder model.

9 Connectivity initiatives must meaningfully extend access remedy to through robust and rights-respecting oversight and grievance processes. Establish points of contact to hear grievances and predictable, transparent procedures to appeal determinations. Participation in a remedial process should never preclude access to courts.

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To foster an enabling environment for digital economies, governments must commit to not block, throttle, or shutdown communications tools and networks, in violation of international human rights. Positively, governments should implement strong network neutrality and data protection regulation, supporting both the economic interests and human rights of local communities.