The Universal Periodic Review and New Emerging Technologies

Date: 4th of October 2023, 54th session of the Human Rights Council
Time: 15:00-16:00 (Geneva)
Location: Palais des Nations, Room XXV, and online
Link:
https://ungeneva-vc.webex.com/ungeneva vc/j.php?MTID=m173ef16a558dc65039b5cebd21765358
Organisers: UPR Info and Access Now

Context

New technologies are among the major drivers of change at a global level. While digital technologies have the potential to positively impact our societies, they also bring new challenges such as cyber threats, digital divides and human rights violations. Digital technologies can improve access to information, but they can also threaten our privacy and increase social, cultural and economic inequalities. In our world, which is changing at unprecedented speed, it is important to ensure that these new technologies and the digital revolution promote and protect human rights. The concept of digital rights invites State and private actors to comply with international standards to ensure that human rights are safeguarded online.

Issues relating to human rights and the impact of new technologies are increasingly being elevated within discussions at the United Nations (UN), particularly the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). In fact, digital rights and digital technologies are a cross-cutting theme in the OHCHR Management Plan 2022-2023. There are also increasing references to these issues from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteurs and in various HRC resolutions. Even the UN Headquarters in New York has prioritised this discussion as evidenced by the UN Secretary General's roadmap for digital cooperation, Our Common Agenda and the UN Global Digital Compact.

However, when we analyse the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations made on these themes over the first 3 cycles, we find that only 483 recommendations out of 90,938 referred to terms such as "internet", "online", "technology", "digital" or "cyber". Thanks to its universality, the UPR can be an extremely effective mechanism for addressing all human rights and is therefore the best tool for raising the visibility and promoting the impact of new technologies in the digital age. The UPR can act as a catalyst to implement national laws for a safe digital space, such as in relation to privacy, data protection and surveillance technologies, and to put in place public policies for access to the Internet for all, awareness-raising campaigns on the use of the Internet and new technologies, among others. Strengthening digital rights through the UPR will have a positive impact on other human rights, such as access to information, freedom of expression, the right to privacy, child protection, etc.

Objectives

This HRC 54th session side event aims to understand the role that the UPR can play to advance human rights in the digital age. The UPR has the potential to advance human rights, as the recommendations may suggest strengthening laws, institutions and suggesting public policies by including specific references to digital and online elements and thus strengthening human rights in a comprehensive manner.

The event will also harness the opportunity to discuss inspiring examples of how digital technologies can contribute to protect and advance human rights.

The discussion will address the following questions:
- What are the human rights implications of new and emerging technologies?
- How could the UPR better contribute to advance digital rights?

Format

This one-hour panel discussion is open to representatives from Member States, experts, and interested civil society organizations.

Speakers are invited to prepare 8/7-minute interventions. A moderated questions and answer period will follow.

Moderator: Ms. Mona M'Bikay, Executive Director, UPR Info

Panellists

- Marcelo Daher, OHCHR
- Anastasiya Zhyrmont, Access Now
- Nighat Dad, Digital Rights Foundation
- Guilherme Canela De Souza Godoi, UNESCO
- TBC, Sudan Archive