

Global Civil Society launches the Internet Social Forum

– With a call to occupy the Internet

PRESS RELEASE. Geneva, Switzerland, 22st January, 2015.

A group of civil society organisations from around the world has announced the Internet Social Forum, to bring together and articulate bottom-up perspectives on the 'Internet we want'. Taking inspiration from the World Social Forum, and its clarion call, 'Another World is possible', the group seeks to draw urgent attention to the increasing centralization of the Internet for extraction of monopoly rents and for socio-political control, asserting that 'Another Internet is possible'!

The Internet Social Forum will *inter alia* offer an alternative to the recently-launched World Economic Forum's 'Net Mundial Initiative' on global Internet governance. While the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the 'Net Mundial Initiative' convene global elites, the Internet Social Forum will be a participatory and bottom-up space for all those who believe that the global Internet must evolve in the public interest; a direct parallel to the launch of the World Social Forum in 2001 as a counter initiative to the WEF.

The Internet Social Forum will reach out to grassroots groups and social movements across the world, catalysing a groundswell that challenges the entrenched elite interests that currently control how the Internet is managed. The Internet Social Forum's preparatory process will kick off during the World Social Forum to take place in Tunis, March 24th to 28th, 2015. The Internet Social Forum itself is planned to be held either late 2015 or early 2016.

“While the world's biggest companies have every right to debate the future of the Internet, we are concerned that their perspectives should not drown out those of ordinary people who have no access to the privileged terrain WEF occupies – in the end it is this wider public interest that must be paramount in governing the Internet. We are organising the Internet Social Forum to make sure their voices can't be ignored in the corridors of power,” said Norbert Bollow, Co-Convenor of the Just Net Coalition, which is one of the groups involved in the initiative.

The Internet Social Forum, and its preparatory process, is intended as a space to vision and build the 'Internet we want'. It will be underpinned by values of democracy, human rights and social justice. It will stand for participatory policy making and promote community media. It will seek an Internet that is truly decentralized in its architecture and based on people's full rights to data, information, knowledge and other 'commons' that the Internet has enabled the world community to generate and share.

Somewhat similar to Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee's call for a 'Magna Carta for the Internet', the Internet Social Forum proposes to develop a People's Internet Manifesto, through a bottom-up process involving all concerned social groups and movements, in different areas, from techies and ICT-for-development actors to media reform groups, democracy movements and social justice activists.

This year will also see the 10 year high-level review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), to be held in New York in December. As a full-scale review of a major UN summit, this will be a critical global political event. Since the WSIS, held in 2003 and 2005, the Internet, and what it means socially, has undergone a paradigm shift. The WSIS witnessed active engagement of civil

society and technical groups as well as of business. However, currently, there seems to be an deliberate attempt to sideline this UN-led initiative on governance issues of the information society and Internet in favour of private, big-business-dominated initiatives like the WEF's Net Mundial Initiative. The Internet Social Forum, while remaining primarily a people's forum, will also seek to channel global civil society's engagement towards the WSIS +10 review.

The following organisations form the initial group that is proposing the Internet Social Forum, and many more are expected to join in the immediate future. This is an open call to progressive groups from all over the world to join this initiative, and participate in developing a People's Internet Manifesto.

Just Net Coalition, Global
P2P Foundation, Global
Transnational Institute, Global
Forum on Communication for Integration of our America, Regional (Latin America)
Arab NGO Network for Development, Regional
Agencia Latinoamericana de Información, Regional
Alternative Informatics Association, Turkey
Knowledge Commons, India
Open-Root/EUROLINC, France
SLFC.in, India
CODE-IP Trust, Kenya
GodlyGlobal.org, Switzerland
Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training, Canada
IT for Change, India
Association for Proper Internet Governance, Switzerland
Computer Professionals Union, Philippines
Free Press, USA
Advocates of Science and Technology for the People, Philippines
Other News, Italy
Free Software Movement of India
Global_Geneva, Switzerland
Solidarius (Solidarity Economy Network), Italy
All India Peoples Science Network, India
Institute for Local Self-Reliance - Community Broadband Networks, USA

Please contact us at secretariat@InternetSocialForum.net for further information or clarification.

Or the following regional contacts:

Europe	Norbert Bollow	Email: NorbertB@InternetSocialForum.net
Asia	Rishab Bailey	Email: RishabB@InternetSocialForum.net
Africa	Alex Gakaru	Email: AlexG@InternetSocialForum.net
North America	Micheal Gurstein	Email: MichealG@InternetSocialForum.net
South America	Sally Burch	Email: SallyB@InternetSocialForum.net