

FOC Steering Committee Monthly Meeting #3 2026

Thursday 26 March | 15.00 UTC

Attendance: Armenia, Estonia, Germany, Ghana, Luxembourg, Moldova, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland (FOC Chair 2026), the United Kingdom; FOC Support Unit.

Summary:

During the third Steering Committee (SC) meeting under Switzerland's Chairship, the Support Unit (SU) provided several updates, including progress on the delivery of the 2026 Capacity Building Programme and ongoing external requests related to internet shutdowns in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Switzerland provided detailed updates on the ongoing implantation of the [2026 Programme of Action](#) around the three goals, as well as a detailed overview of upcoming events in April and May.

Members discussed the review of the Advisory Network's Terms of Reference and development of a joint multistakeholder statement to be published ahead of the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance. The SC also considered plans for the FOC's 15th anniversary, and had the opportunity to provide input on the draft agenda for the forthcoming Strategy and Coordination Meeting, which will take place in Lusaka, Zambia from 4–5 May.

Minutes

Welcome / Opening Remarks

- The SU welcomed Members to the third Steering Committee meeting of 2026 under the Swiss Chairship and provided an overview of the agenda.

Housekeeping

- **SU Updates:**
 - **Geneva Diplomatic Network Kick-off Meeting (4 March):**
 - The meeting formally launched the 2026 workplan of the FOC Geneva Diplomatic Network, bringing together FOC Members, the Advisory Network, and key Geneva-based stakeholders. The meeting introduced the Programme of Action and outlined the objectives and structure of the Diplomatic Network. Discussions also focused on upcoming priorities, including engagement around the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance. The session was well attended and generated constructive exchanges with the Geneva-based community.
 - **Capacity Building Programme:**
 - Following last month's Steering Committee meeting, the SU has begun preparations for the 2026 Capacity Building Programme. Building on feedback, the programme will shift towards more practical, hands-on formats, including scenario-based exercises. The first session will take place during the Strategy and Coordination Meeting (SCM) in Lusaka, Zambia, and will focus on internet shutdowns and coordinated digital repression. The SU is working with the Internet Society to develop a tabletop exercise, building on previous discussions and activities on this topic.
 - **Continued External Pressure on Iran:**
 - The SU noted an increase in external outreach regarding internet shutdowns in Iran. In recent weeks, the SU has received a significant volume of emails from individuals calling on the FOC to issue a public statement. This appears to be part of a coordinated grassroots campaign. In response, the SU shared the existing [Joint Statement on Internet Shutdowns in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#) and is exploring ways to respond collectively. Steering Committee Members were encouraged to continue promoting the Joint Statement through their respective networks.
- **FOC Outputs & Processes:**
 - **FOC Advisory Network (FOC-AN) Review**

- The mandate of the current FOC-AN cohort (2024–2026) will expire during the Swiss Chairship in June 2026. As mandated by the Steering Committee, the Review Committee has now held four meetings and developed recommendations to strengthen the Terms of Reference and AN selection process. These recommendations have been shared with the Steering Committee for sign-off on a no-objections basis, and were discussed in more detail under the discussion item (see below).
- **Upcoming Events & Meetings:**
 - **Events Mapping 2026**
 - The Support Unit provided a brief overview of responses to the Google Form mapping Member engagement across key events and forums in 2026. A total of nine responses were received, which indicated strongest engagement around major global processes, particularly the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance and UN General Assembly. Participation in more regional or specialised events appears more limited. Some Members expressed interest in developing FOC activities in these contexts. The SU and Switzerland will follow up bilaterally to explore coordination opportunities.
 - A detailed overview of upcoming events for April and May was covered during the Programme of Action implementation update.

Chairship and Program of Action 2026 Updates:

Switzerland provided updates on the implementation of the [2026 Program of Action](#), under all three Goals:

Goal 1: Strengthen FOC engagement in global digital governance processes

- **UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance (GDC):**
 - Work is ongoing around engagement in the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance. A key focus is the development of a potential joint multistakeholder statement, which was covered under items for discussion (see below).
- **WSIS+20 Review:**
 - Efforts are underway to support implementation of WSIS+20 outcomes. The Chair reiterated the need for an FOC Member to take on a leading role in this area and invited volunteers.
 - A non-paper on WSIS+20 implementation has been prepared by Switzerland and has been shared with SC Members.
 - Upcoming engagements include:
 - **New York Diplomatic Network Kick-off (16 April, New York):** Presentation of the WSIS non-paper and discussion on implementation priorities.
 - **CSTD29 (20–24 April, Geneva):** A side event on operationalising the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines is being organised.
 - **WSIS Forum (6–10 July, Geneva):** A session proposal 'From ideas to action: the integration of the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines within the broader digital governance processes' has been submitted.
- **Human Rights Council (HRC):**
 - Geneva Diplomatic Network leads will continue convening pre-HRC coordination meetings. Members discussed potential engagement around a forthcoming resolution on women, girls, and digital technologies, led by Armenia. Initial feedback from Geneva stakeholders has been positive, and further consultations are planned.

Goal 2: Address ongoing challenges to Internet freedom and digital resilience

- **Internet Shutdowns:**
 - The [Joint Statement on Internet Shutdowns in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#) remains open for endorsement.
 - The upcoming SCM capacity-building session will also focus on the issue of internet shutdowns.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):**
 - Two key activities are planned:

- **Workshop at RightsCon ‘Operationalising the FOC Rights-Respecting Digital Public Infrastructure Principles’ (Wednesday, 6 May at 11:30, at RightsCon, 5-8 May, Lusaka, Zambia)**, will bring together policymakers, technical community representatives, civil society actors, and development partners to co-develop practical strategies for putting the FOC DPI Principles into action.
 - **A side event at the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Forum (6–7 May, New York, United States)**, led by the Netherlands and Switzerland, exploring responsible DPI in UN processes.
- **Information Integrity:**
 - Switzerland and SU are engaging with partners including the Forum on Information and Democracy (FID), International IDEA, and the Government of Luxembourg to explore potential collaboration on this topic.
 - Discussions are focusing on the intersection of AI and information integrity, including a possible session during the week 6 July in Geneva, when multiple events including the second Strategy and Coordination Meeting (SCM) will also take place.
 - Members highlighted opportunities for coordination with ongoing initiatives and partners, including the Council of Europe and the Media Freedom Coalition.

Goal 3: Operationalise multistakeholder approaches to digital governance

- **FOC 15-Year Anniversary:**
 - Preparations are underway for the FOC’s 15-year anniversary, which will focus on operationalising multistakeholder approaches through a multilayered consultation process including regional dialogues. A concept note has been shared, and was covered under the discussion items (see below).

Discussion items

- **Advisory Network - Review Committee Recommendations**
 - The SU, on behalf of the Review Committee, presented an overview of its recommendations following a review of the Advisory Network (AN) Terms of Reference and selection process.
 - The Review Committee, composed of Troika representatives (Switzerland, Estonia and the Netherlands) and AN Co-Chairs, held four in-depth meetings to address challenges identified during the previous selection cycle, particularly regarding how merit and diversity considerations are balanced in practice, and how balancing criteria are applied.
 - The Review Committee recommendations do not propose fundamental changes to the AN’s mandate, size, or overall model. Instead, the recommendations aim to strengthen the process, making it more transparent, consistent, and operational in practice.
 - Key proposed changes include:
 - Clearer selection criteria, including indicative balancing thresholds.
 - Introduction of term limits and clearer renewal rules.
 - A more clearly defined open selection process and timeline.
 - Clarification of geographic representation vs organisational scope.
 - Development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to guide implementation of the selection process and balancing criteria in practice.
 - For this upcoming cycle only, the SU will conduct the initial application review and propose the AN composition, with an opportunity for input from the AN. This is a practical arrangement for this cycle and not a permanent change to the model.
 - The recommendations will be circulated to the Steering Committee for approval on a no-objection basis. The aim is to finalise the revised Terms of Reference and SOP and launch the selection process by mid-April, with the goal of selecting the new cohort by May 2026, allowing new members to participate in the July Strategy and Coordination Meeting.
 - Steering Committee members welcomed the work of the Review Committee and noted that the proposals strike a balance between maintaining merit-based selection and ensuring diversity, representation, and expertise across the AN.
- **Joint ‘Multistakeholder’ Statement on the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance**
 - The Chair introduced the proposal to develop a joint multistakeholder statement for the first UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance (Geneva, 6–7 July 2026). This was presented as

an opportunity for the Coalition to contribute proactively to shaping the outcomes of the dialogue and to demonstrate the Coalition's multistakeholder approach in practice.

- The statement will build on existing FOC work on digital rights, responsible technology governance, and open digital ecosystems, and will aim to reflect shared priorities across Members and the Advisory Network.
- The SU outlined the proposed drafting process, emphasising the aim to include multiple opportunities for feedback and dialogue, including an interactive hybrid consultation moment at the first SCM in Lusaka, and the opportunity for the Advisory Network to endorse the final statement. A call for written input will be circulated to all FOC Members and the Advisory Network, with a 7-day deadline.
- Steering Committee members welcomed the initiative and emphasised the importance of ensuring the statement aligns with the themes of the Global Dialogue and builds on previous FOC work. Members also noted that the statement could help guide common messaging and interventions by FOC Members during the Dialogue.
- Members also noted the importance of planning communications and dissemination around the statement to ensure impact during and after the Global Dialogue.
- Written submissions to inform the themes and format of the UN Global Dialogue:
 - Estonia informed the Steering Committee that the UN Global Dialogue [written submission portal is now open](#), with a deadline for submissions of 30 April, and encouraged the SU to share this information widely.
 - Germany informed the Committee that TFAIR is also preparing a joint written submission to the Global Dialogue using this portal, and invited FOC Members to contribute to that process; information is forthcoming. It was clarified that this submission is separate from the FOC joint multistakeholder statement.
- **FOC 15 Year Anniversary Concept & Regional Dialogues (10 mins)**
 - The Chair presented the revised concept for the Freedom Online Coalition's 15-year anniversary in December 2026. The anniversary will focus on Goal 3 of the Programme of Action: 'Operationalising multistakeholder approaches to digital governance', with the following outcomes:
 - A high-level anniversary joint statement.
 - Development of practical resources to support multistakeholder engagement.
 - A multistakeholder consultative process delivered through a multilayered consultation process will take place throughout 2026. Regional consultations are being planned at the following events:
 - Africa: DRIF, 14-16 April, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
 - Africa: RightsCon, 5-8 May, Lusaka, Zambia
 - Europe: EuroDIG, 26-27 May, Brussels, Belgium
 - Additional consultations are being explored for Asia and Latin America
 - The Steering Committee was asked to support outreach and encourage participation from government and multistakeholder partners in their respective regions.
 - Members supported the approach and highlighted the importance of:
 - Sharing information and invitations for regional dialogues as early as possible.
 - Ensuring regional consultations include a wide range of stakeholders beyond those already engaged with the Coalition.
 - Linking anniversary discussions with the development of the next Programme of Action.
- **Strategy and Coordination Meeting 1 - Agenda**
 - The Chair introduced the upcoming Strategy and Coordination Meeting (SCM), which will take place on 4-5 May 2026 in Lusaka, preceded by a Steering Committee meeting and dinner on Sunday, 3 May.
 - The Chair emphasised that holding the SCM alongside RightsCon presents an important opportunity for the Coalition to engage directly with stakeholders from the Global Majority, particularly from across Africa, and encouraged Steering Committee Members to attend in person.
 - The SU presented the draft SCM agenda, noting that it remains subject to change. Key components will include:
 - A multistakeholder capacity-building session on internet shutdowns and coordinated digital repression;

- Government and Advisory Network parallel sessions, including discussions on common messaging for the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance and the joint multistakeholder statement;
- A joint session with the Media Freedom Coalition on the margins of World Press Freedom Day;
- Consultations on the Freedom Online Coalition's 15-year anniversary; and
- A joint roundtable between Members and the Advisory Network.
- The Swedish Embassy has also kindly offered to host a reception for SCM participants on the evening of Monday, 4 May
- Members welcomed the agenda and highlighted the importance of using RightsCon as an opportunity to disseminate FOC statements and outputs.

AOB

- Luxembourg informed the SC that civil society organisations have expressed interest in briefing the FOC on crisis connectivity and restoring connectivity during internet shutdowns, including via satellite solutions. It was suggested that this could be organised as a future FOC learning call.
- The next Steering Committee call will take place on Wednesday, 29 April 2026.