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World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2023

HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE: Setting Standards for Sustainable
Development:
Adopting a Rights-based Approach to Technical
Standard Setting
ROOM C

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>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Good morning, and welcome to the setting the standards for sustainable development, adopting a rights-based approach to technical standard settings.

I will be moderating this session. My name is Bilel Jamoussi with ITU. It's a great progress that I welcome you all to this high-level session today.

And I'd like to begin by inviting our Deputy Secretary-General Mr. Tomas Lamanauskas, to provide opening remarks. Tomas, please.

>> TOMAS LAMANAUSKAS: Thank you very, very much, Bilel, for this opportunity, and as we just discussed, very important to get the right speech in front of you in this session.

But indeed, I think the good thing about this forum is all about, you know, people-centered and humanized based approaches. So I think starting with the wrong speech, I will be in the right track in this session as well.

But indeed, really big pleasure to be here, and in this high-level dialogue standard sustainable development

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co-organized by ITU and office of High Commission on human rights. And great to see Peggy Hicks here, with the special human development division of office of High Commissioner and indeed it's not the first time we are sharing the panel. Just a month ago it was my pleasure to be at your place, to be your guest, to really contribute to the consultation on standards, emergence technologies and human rights. And great to see other colleagues from other standards organizations and just our family in the organization here with us as well.

And welcome Professor CAR as well to this Human Rights Council. We think we have a great panel here to learn from as well.

Indeed and as I already mentioned, so, this session today is part of the series of conversations between -- so that ITU and office of High Commission of human rights have been convening over the past year on adopting a rights-based approach to technical standard-setting. And the standards play important role in the tech world. So, the tech world, especially with emerging and changing and always diverging, it's not very easy. And it's also new and emerging technologies keep penetrating our lives and societies and making it more complex with many consequences that we cannot always know.

And, of course, and even this week is another week of the break-throughs. We just saw, I think Tuesday launched the GPT 4. I want to make sure that also, kind of, you know that I keeping with the news. And, again, with probably -- and it sounds sometimes like a small increments, but increments raise new questions about how technologies are impacting our lives as well.

So, but this where the standards, I think is that way to make sense of the technology and, kind of, make sure that we all in the standards in the same way and I think that's where -- that's how they are important.

The independent design, development and deployment of technologies make sure that they work together, help make them safer, more accessible, more affordable and more sustainable.

One of our co-functions and across, actually, all the sectors in a way, because from our -- from the key conference organization sector that Bilel is representing, but of course radiocommunications sector as well, radiocommunications standards. And Development Sector where we make sure everyone together with the gap is

so-called bridge, and everyone is on the same page in that regard.

So, this link between standards and human rights has also been enshrined in Human Rights Council's deliberations and indeed already in -- further the discourse advance in 2021 with a call of closer cooperation between office of High Commissioner of human rights and standard development organizations including the ITU. I'm not sure, but that's probably when the first time ITU was named in the Human Rights Council resolution and we are proud of that reference and importance that it gives.

And the fact is that for standards to truly work building the digital future we want, they need to be the result of the process that's inclusive, transparent and aligned with our ambitions for a better world. And I think we also -- so the process is as important as the result and making sure that that will also creating and that all aspects in account.

A few weeks ago the worlds standards corporation meeting attended by colleagues here as well from organizations as well had the discussion with the High Commissioner Volcker Turk with the key outcome being in agreement to foster greater collaboration between technical standards and human rights communities and we hope to pick up on those discussions here today as well.

We together with our colleagues around the table, we feel we are uniquely positioned to bolster collaborative spirit among standard developments. And we specifically as ITU, the agency for additional technologies is also fully committed to the goal and to make sure that our standards reflect the strive-based -- our work is highly technical in scope but inclusion and, again, people are at the heart of our design.

And we welcome in our work, we welcome sector experts for all these disciplines, although we acknowledge the telling work is sometimes more welcoming to some people with some disciplines than others. I think it's important that that cross disciplinary discussion happens and we find the right ways to do that.

Going forward, I hope we will see more and more interdisciplinary experts participating in our work and also want to reiterate our call to other UN agencies, our Sister Agencies, including office of High Commissioner to join our work and join our discussions in the study groups and focus groups and make sure our members and experts are

informed of different aspects of the work and different aspects that they work having.

So, really, I would like to conclude my remarks there and letting this discussion to start, and my really thanks today for all the panelists from the office of human rights, from the transition organizations, from the member states, but also Human Rights Council, as well as civil society, joining us today for this vibrant discussion. And we are looking forward to working with all of you to make sure that we really build that future for all, you know, and that inclusive and human rights respecting future and we are underpinned by our technical standards. Thank you very much.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you very much Deputy Secretary-General of ITU for your opening remarks on this very important topic.

I'd like to welcome everyone here. I see many members of the diplomatic community in Geneva, as well as many technical experts in our group. So, a very warm welcome.

Now I would like to turn to our partner in the UN system on this topic for context setting by Peggy Hicks, the director of thematic engagement, special procedures and Right to Development Division for setting the context for us today. Peggy.

>> PEGGY HICKS: Thank you so much, Bilel. And Tomas, thank you. I think you have said most of what I had in my remarks, which also shows our very detailed collaboration in this space. No, I think it's a positive thing, for sure.

And just to grateful to be here with you, Ambassador And representatives of the standards organizations. It's a conversation that we have been very pleased to be a part of. And I think we have got real momentum in talking around technical standards setting and human rights over the course of the year.

We were a part of a panel at I GF earlier this year and the High Commissioner was part of the world standards conference just last month. So, we are really building this discussion piece by piece. We are very grateful to be able to be here with all of you at WSIS today to both take that conversation forward and talk a bit about where we stand.

As has been mentioned, I don't need to convince those in the room or online about the importance of technical standards. I mean, the reality is getting them right is

essential in all ways, but, obviously, particularly as well for achieving better human rights outcomes.

If we make poor design choices, we will see a range of human rights violations resulting. Examples relate to the level of security baked into internet-related standards, it can either prevent or facilitate unlawful interception and surveillance. Weak encryption standards can jeopardize data security and the safety of our communications online and the safety of human rights activists and defenders.

So, we need to make sure that we get this right, that we are effectively integrating human rights considerations into technical standards setting. And I think there is a real commitment across the system and across these conversations to do that.

So, then, the issue is where do we stand and how do we move forward. I think what we see, of course, is that there are some real positive and powerful examples of how standards have moved forward in the past year. We have been asked by the Human Rights Council explicitly to conduct the expert consultation, which Tomas referred to in February, and coming out of that and the work that we have done over the year will be a forthcoming report from the High Commissioner for Human Rights that will be released in June.

So, we, through those conversations, have heard from standards setting organizations, the private sector, academia and civil society. They have shared views from different perspectives and highlighted the challenges and innovative ways that they think we can better integrate human rights into standard-setting processes.

What came through through those conversations was the fact that we understand that creating standards is necessary, but that people believe that standard-setting organizations are at a place now where widening the lens and looking at the deep impacts that the technologies have on societies, on communities, and on individuals is absolutely necessary.

So, to take that wider lens, to bring that human rights perspective more effectively into technical standards setting, we saw that there was a need for really four areas of development. The first is increased transparency of processes.

The second is greater awareness amongst standards setting organizations and their traditional participants.

The third is stronger incentives for the drivers of

standardization to consider human rights.

And finally, better facilitated access to development and decision making for all stakeholders in these processes, so particularly civil society organizations. And that, I think, is one of the real takeaways, is there's really an urgent need to increase representation of civil society voices, including from the Global South and to make standard-setting processes much more gender diverse and integrate voices from historically marginalized communities.

So, there's a lot of work to be done from our perspective. But I think it's also important to say that the progress is underway.

The fact that we are sitting here already is a testament to the fact that we have come together to look at these issues and see what can -- what further efforts can be made. And I want to emphasize that a number of standard-setting organizations have already enhanced their efforts to make their processes more inclusive and inviting. For example, by lowering and waiving fees, by adopting and enforcing codes of conduct, by improving onboarding programmes and starting inclusion funds.

A number of standard-setting organizations have also made their documentation, drafts, minutes, emails, decisions available to the public for free. And that's a model we would like to see adopted across all standard-setting organizations to ensure that the public has full access to the information necessary and that there is full accountability for the far-reaching decisions that are being made in these fora.

I do want to really acknowledge the important work that's been done by civil society over many years, over the last decade, really, to move this conversation around human rights and technical standard-setting forward. And I think these successes and changes we have in broadening this dialogue are really a reflex of that.

We have with us today Article 19, but also a shout-out to the centre for democracy and technology, to Rachel Dilatalas and Global Partners Digital, some of the key partners we have worked with in this area.

To close by saying that we have started to build the bridges -- Tomas mentioned the bridges as well -- between the communities that are interested in this area. Those bridges are the important first step to making real results. And now what we need to do is really talk about

how we break down the existing barriers in a more effective way, and how we actualize on the fact that we are all committed to having better integration of human rights within technical setting processes and what will it take realistically and actively to make that happen. Thank you.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you very much, Peggy, for setting the scene for us and recalling some of the actions that have been taken so far to start this process of engagement between the standards community and the human rights experts in providing that bridge, as you said, the bridge is under construction and then now we have to move into removing the barriers.

Today we are joined by an esteemed panel. We have His Excellence professor Muhammad Kah from the Cambia Ambassador in Geneva.

Mr. Gilles Thonet, Director of the Secretary-General's Office and Secretary of the SMB, the Standards Management Board, at the International Electrotechnical Commission, IEC, which is our neighbor just across the street.

And Mr. Jose-Ignacio Alcorta, Head of Standards Development at ISO, International Standards Organization, also based here in Geneva.

And Ms. Vidushi Marda, Senior Programme Officer of Article 19.

We came together in this session with our partners in standards, ISO and IEC, basically, the three international standards organizations based in Geneva, as mentioned by the Deputy Secretary-General and Peggy, as a result of the session we had at the end of February. The World Standards Cooperation is a group that brings IEC, ISO and ITU leadership at the president level and the CEO level to meet once a year and collaborate and cooperate on international standards. This year, and it's the hosting this meeting is on a rotation basis, so this year the ITU was the host of WSC. So, we are very pleased to have the presidents of the three organizations, basically, the president of ISO, IEC, and our secretary, again, as well as the CEOs of these three organizations, the Sec Gen of IEC, ISO and the TSB director, and we had a fruitful conversation where the High Commissioner was the keynote speaker.

At every WSC meeting we invite a keynote speaker and this year we chose to have the High Commissioner to really introduce the resolution from the Human Rights Council and then see how we can move into a more action oriented effort towards bridging standards and human rights.

And what, basically, transpired from that very educational session, I think Mr. Turk was excellent in terms of explaining the basics of human rights and the linkage between the digital technologies and human rights in that session.

(The meeting was ended by the Zoom host).

>> Recording in progress.

>> MUHAMMADOU KAH: I will stretch it forward and say even the economic consideration. When we step back a little bit, I remembered in my days in graduate school on technology, it wasn't human rights. It was, actually, human factors in the design of technology, human factors engineering and human computer interaction and cybernetics, began to be issues that we had to factor in in engineering designs and, certainly, on the digital assets.

When I think about internet architecture design and technical standards they maintain an influential role on the exercise of everyone's human rights online, including the rights to freedom of assembly and association.

What does that mean when you wrap around standards on the technology that is used as a platform, I think is a question that must be in our mind.

When technical standard settings does not take into account global human rights obligations, there remain gaps in digital protections. And when we fail to implement human rights standards in our technical framework, for example, the internet becomes a platform that only fails to uphold basic freedoms and empowers human rights abuses. And we have began to experience that.

It becomes a tool that governments and private actors can use to enable censorship, content restrictions and security. When there are no safeguards in place to protect human rights, the daily mechanisms we use to identify, recognize, to track individuals can be abused for governments, solvents and commercial tracking purposes. So, that connects to what I have said earlier. The technical constraints and the regulatory landscapes have created a more homogenous internet across borders for the exacerbating inequalities, lack of inclusion and poses risks to human rights violations.

States will enact policies wholly banning international data flows, encouraging interferences with freedoms of expressions and compromising privacy and encryption implementations. What can we do with standards in that regard becomes very crucial, as we all evolve in adoption

and use of these technologies.

I would also say that an example, technical standards can address issues that are confronting us in the digital space, such as privacy, such as security, such as accessibility, such as data protection. Where? In the development and emergence of these new technologies.

They can also promote interoperability and compatibility between differences of technologies which can facilitate access to information and services for everyone, regardless of technical expertise or the devices or geographical location. Access to information is a right. And if that is violated by the technology, whether intended or unintended, must be addressed as we move forward.

Technical standards can also provide frameworks for accountability, and I think it was mentioned earlier, as well as oversight that helped to prevent abuses of technology that might violate human rights. However, it is important to note that technical standards alone cannot or is not sufficient to guarantee the respect of human rights. I think we have to recognize that.

And I think what was said earlier on the code of conduct, I think it was Peggy that mentioned that. And I am of the view that there must be a multilateral mechanism to architect and develop mindful pragmatic code of conducts as it relates to standards. The multilateral system have a role to play, as we in the Human Rights Council have began to address these issues that are emerging daily on human rights violation and its protection in the digital space.

So, there must be -- this must be complimented by smart, legal and regulatory framework, as well as by social and cultural norms to guide these conducts that I am talking about and to promote the respect for human dignity and diversity and inclusivity.

So, we must not use design technologies with standards that do not enable us to guarantee those elements that I have just mentioned.

So, where am I going with this? Recognizing the increasing important role of digital technologies in the fight against terrorism. And there's a whole lot to unpack when we look at terrorism and the use of digital technologies and the violations of rights that result as a consequences of these things, because human rights centric design was not embedded in this technology. So government security agencies around the world, we know, are using a range of digital techniques and tracking to monitor

potential terrorist threats. These techniques include social media monitoring, data mining and analysis, cybersecurity, biometric identifications, drones and other surveillance technologies.

How do we reason rationally and pragmatically with the conscience of humanity at the centre of it, knowing that there is -- these things are going to just escalate and are going to be more intelligent as we move forward. Restricting it is not the answer. But being mindful of embedding the standards that design these technologies are critical.

So, while these digital technologies are powerful tools in the fight against terrorism, there are concerns about the impact on privacy and civil liberties.

It is important that governments across the world, in my mind, and security agencies use these techniques in a responsible and transparent manner with appropriate oversight and accountability measures in place with human rights in mind. Very, very important. So, I will stop there, and then maybe there's an opportunity to come back on the other elements as it relates to the multistakeholder aspect of the topic. Thank you so much.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you very much, Excellency, for your answers to these questions.

I would like to turn to Gilles Thonet from IEC. Same questions. You retain them?

>> GILLES THONET: Yes. Thank you. Thank you very much, Bilel, and thanks to ITU for hosting this very interesting panel together with the High Commission on Human Rights.

I have prepared just a couple of slides to illustrate and try to answer the question that was raised by Bilel. But, perhaps, very quickly for those of you who don't know the IEC, so, we are one of the three international together with ITU and ISO. We were born, actually, in 1906 with the birth of electricity. So, first mission was to standardize electricity and make it safe.

At the time, let's be honest, we were mainly a club of engineers. Let's say human rights were probably not on top of the agenda. You know, human rights were important, but that was for society, not necessarily for, let's say, a technical body or standard-setting organization like the IEC.

But then with the development of technologies, electronics, information technologies, the convergence of

technologies, as was raised by His Excellency as well, well, human rights are becoming a critical issue.

And after, actually, the WSC meeting that you referred previously, we started doing a little bit of a mapping and we realized that many of our standards are impacting or may have an impact on human rights. And I am just -- I am just listing let's say three examples in this slide here. Technical standards, of course, cover a large range of technologies and also infrastructures that have a significant impact on human rights.

One example is artificial intelligence. We mentioned ChatGPT just a moment ago, together with all friends at ISO, we are working on standards for artificial intelligence. As you know, AI can be used for the best or for the worst. You can have diocese in terms of genders, race, inequality.

So, we are developing now standards to address those barriers and help also the product manufacturer to build, let's hope, fair product using AI, which might have a tremendous impact on human rights.

We have also a publication on ethics and AI. So, even without explicitly putting human rights on top of the agenda, we realize it's there already.

Second example, the access to energy. This is a key theme for the IEC. If you don't have access to energy, it's difficult to have human rights. Access to energy is an enabler for food, for clean water, for education. One example we have been working on in the IEC is a technical term called LVDC, low voltage direct current, which allows some developing countries or rural communities not having a solid electricity grid to use renewable energies to, for instance, help cook food or help light during part of the day, to allow children to study, go to school, and educate themselves. So, that's the standards that have been driven by India in particular and got global consensus worldwide as well.

Third example, we talked about gender equality. It's still an issue in the world. It's probably on top of the agenda in many countries, but it's still an issue for the standards community.

In the IEC, we realize that some of the technical standards have been made by men, men, basically. If you look at very mundane technical topics like electrical protection, actually, we realized that the standards are not always -- or they don't always fit the needs of women.

So, that was a little bit of a discovery for us. It was not done by, let's say, an ill intent. But just because people didn't realize it.

So, what we did, together with our friends at ISO, we created a group on gender responsive standards. And I know ITU or UNEC have similar initiatives to make sure that our technical community have clear guidelines to take into account, let's say, the need of all genders when making technical standards.

So, those are, let's say, typical examples where our technical standards directly impact human rights.

Now, let's be very clear, the IEC, like ISO, we are not governmental organization. Our standards are always voluntary. And that's important to remember. If I come to the second part of the question, what is the role of the standard-setting organizations, we believe we are -- we have a complimentary world. We need to partner with other organizations here. We are not a substitute for policymaking, for law development or for regulation. We need to partner with them.

And if you move to the next slide, I have just two examples where the IEC has been partnering with different kind of stakeholders to really promote its standards. One example is the -- what we call the Global Impact Fund, which is a recent initiative. Part of, let's say, the SNSG initiative to help address key challenges in the developing world, which might have a direct impact on human rights, again, energy access, climate change, and what we do is that we identify small enterprises in those countries where we give funds to deploy IEC standards in some very concrete applications.

So, the project is funded by both IEC and some donors. And the goal is to very concretely help also partners directly in the developing world implementing those standards which might have a direct impact on Sustainable Development Goals and eventually human rights as well.

The first project we had was on e-waste, which is a huge problem, a critical challenge in the world, and in particular in the developing world.

The second project we are now looking at is more around electricity access, which is a key topic of the IEC.

Now, if you could move to the next slide. This is a second example which, kind of, illustrate a little bit about how we see ourself in this forum. And I am referring, again, to a topic which I mentioned, which is

artificial intelligence. So, last year, actually, in this building, we organized a conference together with the Swiss Government and also with participation of ITU and ISO, on the interplay between standardization and regulation for artificial intelligence. That was really a huge success.

And, actually, the key words here is really the word interplay. And we believe standard-setting organizations need to partner together with others to advance sustainable goals and human rights in particular.

So, I will stop here. Back to you. And happy to continue after the dialogue. Thank you.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSE: Thank you. Thank you very much, Gilles. And as you were presenting, I was also looking at the four points that Peggy mentioned in her presentation or introduction. Transparency of the process, the awareness, the incentives and the access to the development process, if I may summarize it. So, keep that in mind as we look at the actions that you are proposing for the standards community.

I'd like now to turn to my colleague from ISO, Mr. Alcorta who is the head of standards development at ISO. Please.

>> JOSE-IGNACIO ALCORTA: Thank you very much. It's an honour to be here today. I would like to share some views from my organization. ISO is an independent nongovernmental organization, we were formed by 168 members, experts from different stakeholder groups and they develop the collection of international standards that are consensus based, one of the main principles that we follow. And that they have voluntary. So, often call self-regulation but they are voluntary standards. We don't impose them on any of those that use them.

If you move to the next slide, please. This is just a depiction of where we are globally in terms of our membership and if you move to the next slide I would like to give you background to set the scene on the size of ISO and what we do. The core is the ISO strategy 2030 that has sustainability as one of the main principles for development of our operations.

We are formed with 168 members, appointed by the government, and they nominate experts from the different stakeholder groups to participate in the technical committees.

We talk about committees and committees and working groups that develop the standards and the size is

currently -- well, these are the figures from 2022. You can see that it is close to 3 1/2 thousand entities. That has a collection of projects that are currently under development in the size of over 4,000.

We have more or less the same every year, which is about 1500 new projects. And we publish around 1500 standards. So, that's quite consistent.

In the database we have around 50,000 experts from those organizations, members and liaison that I mentioned, that contribute to the work. And there are an average 41 meetings a day every day of the year.

But this is not only ISO members, but also we engage with other partners, international, regional and NGO organizations, and we are working with over 800 of them. So, that creates this 24,000 standards in our collection.

ISO Secretariat is a small operation based here in Geneva and we have around 175 members of staff. We do have a policy of diversity, inclusion and gender and you can see that we try to represent as many of our members as possible. Last year it was 29. Now with new recruitment we are on 31 and growing. And we have a ratio of male/female 62 to 38 where you can see that gender is also quite important.

With that background, let me move on to the next slide and tell you, what is the relationship between technical standards and human rights? Well, ISO being from the beginning very involved in human rights through a fair society. ISO was created in 1947, after the second world war as an effort to help with the reconstruction efforts. So, although we have moved from technical standards promoted reconstruction, we moved into more societal areas with a strong focus lately in particular with the UNSDGs on human rights.

We have not so new social responsibilities have been in place for over 10 years, and ISO 2006 thousand contains a specific clause 6 that talks about human rights. This has inspired good standards particularly in the area of good covenants, whistleblowing, et cetera. We have also have new work started couple weeks ago on food loss and food waste, also very important, a link to the coordination committee on smart farming.

We also have work with the -- in developing standards for healthcare. And we have seen how ISO and IEC provide three standards during the pandemic to help members cope with terrible disease.

We also have climate change mitigation standards on reduction of emissions on adaptation, which we have done particularly in conjunction with UNF triple C and we have been in events for over 10 years.

Gender equality as you mentioned is quite important. Not only through that programme of gender responsive standards, but also we have a new committee that is providing guidance on gender equality and the standard will probably be published next year, it's quite advanced.

We also have occupational health and safety. Again, working with the ILO on a fair standard to reduce the casualties and injuries in organizations. Sustainable production and conception is a topic of research that we are working and looking into at the moment. We have proposal on a standard for modern slavery and human trafficking which is also going to be quite important as inspired by the social responsibility standard.

And, of course, economy is one of the key topics but when we work with our developing countries.

So, we move to the next slide, I will be able to tell you more about how can technical standards without the true design or implementation impact the exercise of human rights. I mentioned the ISO strategy 2030 which forced us diversity and inclusivity. We supplement that by having some technical policy committees where we have specifically voices from the consumer groups, consumer internationals and they provide insights on support to those operations developing standards.

80% of our members are developing countries, so we have a committee that provides policy supporting their involvement on active participation on fairness. So, I know it's not only standard takers, but standard developers.

And then we have to put this together the in that puzzle, the Costco, the conformity assessment committee which provides the tools on conformity assessment certification, et cetera, so that we bring trust to the consumers.

In addition, we also have ISO guides on sustainability, et cetera. And let's move on to the next question, because I think it's also important to touch based on the role of the different stakeholders can play.

The core of operations all voices heard and we have programmes with developing countries on the stakeholder engagement for all ISO members. So, this is a national

level. So, they have national committees where we have all stakeholders represented on the bill consensus and bring it to ISO where we have the second level of consensus across all the nations. And as I mentioned, we collaborate with over 800 international organizations to bring those other specific views. And we monitor that this balance representation of stakeholders in all our operations on top of the strategic partnerships.

And I think I will stop there, since we are running out of time.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you, thank you very much, Mr. Alcorta from ISO, for sharing with us the answers to the question from an ISO perspective.

I'd like now to move to our colleague, Vidushi Marda from Article 19, who is a Senior Programme Officer, to address the same questions. Over thank you.

>> VIDUSHI MARDA: Thank you so much and the challenge of going after four excellent speakers, I'm not sure what else I can add. But I'm going to try.

So, I think when we are thinking about the relationship between technical standards and human rights, it helps to look at the lifecycle of technology. So, standardization is a point of intervention between when a technology has passed the proof of concepts phase, but before it goes into the market.

So, what role does standardization really play? It can signal legitimacy of a particular technology, standardization is not an easy process. It has to go through many, many stakeholders and rounds of review, and the foremost experts on a particular technology are constantly evaluating your work. So, if you get through the standardization process, it signals to your colleagues, to your peers, and also to other companies and countries that the technology that is being, you know, discussed in the particular standardization body is legitimate.

Standards also play a significant role in shaping markets. So, if something can be standardized and if many people agree on it, then the uptick of that also influences what the market, kind of, looks like. I think wi-fi is a good example. Once the wi-fi standard was agreed upon, we saw Apple come up with the ability to connect to the internet through wi-fi and that's why it's, you know, one of the most popular ways that we can connect to the internet. It wasn't by any means the only one. But because the market shaped up in such a way, we think of

connecting to the wi-fi as connecting to the internet today.

And I think finally, also in the same vein, interoperability is an important and advantage in standards. When we think of how standards involved as my co-panelists spoke about to electricity to now bio metrics and AI, the role of AI have to be changed. When we were thinking about standards for switches, we were thinking about safety and robustness and the fact that if I plug my head from India in Geneva, nothing should happening to the building or to me, right?

Now we have started standardizing different types of technology because technology has evolved. We are thinking of bio melt trick systems, official recognition, we are thinking of emotional recognition, we are thinking of digital ID. And because the nature of these technologies have changed, the conversation around standards also necessarily must change.

I think the important thing and the second question that was put forth, which is nature of technical standards bodies I think is an interesting one, because for the longest time we would say technical standards bodies produce voluntary standards so they are private actors and they have a responsibility to meaningfully consider human rights under the UN Guiding Principles in business and human rights and that was the end of that conversation. And, you know, we would think about how to achieve that in a meaningful way.

However, if you look at recent lens, so, for instance, if you look at the EU AI act, the role of standards bodies is changing a little bit and pivoting a little bit as my co-panelists have also alluded to. So, under the EU AI Act, for example, if an AI system is a high-risk AI system, then that -- to demonstrate compliance with the Act, one route to do so would be to comply with harmonized standards under the EU. We see the standards bodies are now playing a slightly different, very, very important role possibly within the confines of a legislation and play an important role in determining what compliance with that legislation actually looks like.

So, I think this is a really important point in time to think about the nature of standards bodies and also the impact that it has beyond just technology, because as we know, technology is a social technical system that not only depends on the technical specifications and performance,

like we did in the time of switches and electricity, but also biometric standards, especially in AI standards depend a lot on not just what the technical system is doing, but how we can think about things beyond the technical system such as institutions, particular contexts, the people who are subject to technologies and the institutional realities within which technologies are used.

I will stop there. I have a lot to say about the second part of it, so I'm going to save some of my time for that, if that's okay.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you, thank you very much.

So, that concludes our round 1 of questions and answers. I'd like to thank you very much for that. And would like now to move to round 2, which will be timed at three minutes only, not seven. And the first question is to His Excellency Professor Muhammad Kah, what are the most important actors that can affect greater integration of human rights into technical standards setting process or processes and how can they be supported?

>> MUHAMMADOU KAH: Thank you so much. In my mind, the most important actors that can effectuate greater integration and human rights into standards, one is civil organization, social security organizations. Two, human rights advocates, industry stakeholders, government and intergovernmental organizations. These are very crucial and I think we have heard from Article 19 in ISO which embodies that.

So, to support these actors in effectuating greater integration of human rights into these standards, several steps can be taken. One, capacity building. Capacity building initiatives can help to build the knowledge and skills of civil society organizations, human rights advocates, the industry stakeholders. In the area of human rights and technology, we can include training, mentoring, and other forms.

The other, second point, is collaboration and partnerships. This cannot be solved by one pathway. So, collaboration substantive and meaningfully collaborations and partnerships between these actors, civil society associations, human rights advocates, industry stakeholders and governments, can help to ensure that technical standards are meaningfully developed and implemented in a way that will promote human rights.

These partnerships with also build trust. And I think trust was one of the elements that came out, and promote

constructive dialogue between different stakeholders.

Thirdly, funding and support. Governments and intergovernmental organizations can provide funding and support for initiatives that promote integration of human rights into technical standard-setting processes. This can include support for standard-setting bodies, research and development initiatives and capacity building programmes.

Fourthly, partnership participations and input. Very crucial. All stakeholders should be encouraged to participate constructively in technical standard-setting processes and provide input in the development of technical standards, and that must include even environments where technology hasn't emerged in a matured way. Meaning the voice of the Global South, we can help ensure that technical standards reflect truly the needs and interests of all members of society and promote the development of technology that respects human rights.

So, overall, I will conclude by supporting these actors and agents to take these steps, in my mind it is possible to effectively human rights into technical standard-setting processes and to build a more just and equitable and inclusive digital world.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Great. Great on time. Thank you very much. Very clear, Ambassador.

Gilles Thonet, how much awareness exists about human rights within standard-setting organizations and their members, and how can this be enhanced?

>> GILLES THONET: Thank you, Bilel. I am going to try to be very concise, in the interest of time. I think generally speaking, awareness has been raising a lot and I think this is mainly due to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which it is a journey we have embarked a few years back and try to map our standards to the SDGs. So, I think this has really helped raise the awareness in our technical community developing standards.

And I believe we can do the same, as well, with human rights. I would probably single out two focus points that we need to work on. We are already working on. First one is inclusion. Having many more stakeholders around the table. As I said before, standards used to be made by -- mostly by engineers, industry or the research sector. Now we have a much more diverse base of participants in our standards development process.

And the second aspect is recognizing, as I said before, this interplay. And I think it's really important that we

collaborate together. We started doing that on artificial intelligence last year. I think we should replicate this model also, potentially about human rights. Because we have to recognize that we cannot solve this problem alone. So, I would stop here, Bilel, in the interest of time. Thank you.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you very much.

Mr. Alcorta, how accessible are standard-setting processes to all stakeholders? Do the policies and membership requirements of standard-setting organizations facilitate the participation of all stakeholders?

>> JOSE-IGNACIO ALCORTA: Well, ISO has a very strong process where the 168 members are encouraged to participate actively in the technical work that I mentioned earlier. The process is that in order to be participating members, they have to have a national mirror committees. To establish national committees they need to engage with the stakeholders. They have to be open to all groups. It's not about big companies dominating the discussions. It's about balanced representation all of those groups in the national mirror committees.

For that we have ISO capacity building unit that provides a funding on training, train the trainer programmes to ensure that the members, when they join ISO, as is, for instance, the case on the 1st of April we will have a new member, South Sudan, and we are providing training so that it can engage with the national stakeholder groups and be represented in that process.

So, the systems are there. There are some challenges. And for that, the ITD department is providing new solutions and tools to foster that collaboration at a national level so that they can participate actively in those processes.

So, I think that the system is strong. There are challenges that we are facing. We have put measures in place in terms of the IT tools. And also in terms of programmes like the youth programme, we are engaging with academic organizations in developing countries with our focus of making all voices heard.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you very much for being concise and clear.

Now I would like to turn to Vidushi. What are the ways that SDOs can facilitate meaningful and sustainable participation of all stakeholders, including civil society organizations, human rights experts and academics in technical standard-setting processes?

>> VIDUSHI MARDA: Thank you so much. I think this is a really important question because when we think about inclusion and diversity, often the focus is on who to bring into the room. But I want to focus a little bit on what the room should look like. So, Article 19, based on our decade long work, at different standard bodies we have come up with five conditions for standard-setting that can meaningfully respect human rights.

The first is openness, right? If people want to participate in processes, how easy is it to participate in that? So, here we can think about how easy is it to access the different meetings. Is there funding support? Do we have enough inclusion in terms of different languages, so on and so forth.

The second is inclusion. So, the first is openness. The second is inclusion. And inclusion, actually, refers to the culture of the room once you have gotten people in. So, you know, what do voting rights look like? How easy is it to participate in the process? Does everyone's voice count equally? Are some voices more consequential than others. So, on and so forth.

The third is transparency, and I think this is a big one, especially as we are talking about technologies that have human rights implications and public interest, which is the process of standard-setting needs to be more transparent in what is happening, but also be more transparent as it is happening. So, how are we open to public comment? Who can comment on this? What are the consequences of those comments, so on and so forth.

But fourth is accountability. So, people can, say, participate in public consultations, you can have civil society, people with different expertise, people from the majority world in the room. But how are their inputs taken into account, and what is the, you know, kind of, framework that is used to decide whose input is worthwhile or not. And what happens to inputs that are not taken as seriously as others? There's an actual loop of, we have heard you. This is what we considered. This is why we can or can't go ahead, I think is an important part that is currently not as robust as it should be.

And the final one, the final condition for standard-setting, which I think is really important is to have a high level human rights policy commitment within the SDO. And this is really important because, for instance, when we try to work on ethical standards for autonomous

systems back in 2016, one of the things that we came up against was most people wanted the first general principle that guides AI systems to be human well-being. And we said we need something that is legally binding, that has shared understanding so we need human rights to be the first general principle and that was, kind of, a hill that we had to climb for a long period of time.

So, I think having a high-level policy human rights commitment is really a prerequisite to do any kind of meaningful standard-setting. That is my attempt at a concise answer. Thank you.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you very much. Very clear.

I would like now to turn to the audience and see if you have any questions. Both in the room and online. Yes, please, if you can introduce yourself and ask your question.

>> AUDIENCE: Yeah I'm the secretary detector of the transcompute association. What would you think of an initiative that would bring together different governments in an open process to create some of the standards that international organizations are not able to do it because of their decision-making process.

So, maybe a few goodwill nations also IGOs could come together to create the standards that some of the current IGOs are not able to do because of geopolitics and stuff like that. 4:00 p.m. on that front in the cafeteria. So I wanted to know if that track could be something that could defeat the gridlock, no, on creating standards that are needed.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Okay. Any takers? Do you understand the question? Yes, please, go ahead, Alcorta.

>> JOSE-IGNACIO ALCORTA: Thank you very much. Very interesting question. I didn't like the differentiation between governments and other groups because from the ISO IEC perspective, we mentioned stakeholders. Governments are one stakeholder group. We do develop standards from the bottom-up approach. I talked about how we were created in 1947 and how we are responding to global needs. We still doing that today.

So, I don't see any barriers to bringing proposals to these international organizations, ISO, IEC and ITU, to develop those where we engage with all interested parties.

So, I don't see a problem with using that well-known format. And, again, one thing is the development. The other thing is the implementation. We have capacity

building activities and programmes with developing countries and we are engagement with those governments that can use this well-known process to use or reference those international standards.

So, again, examples of antibribery, sustainable procurement, those international standards are now the foundation of many regulatory pieces in a number of countries. So, I think it's all there. Thank you.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSE: Thank you very much. I know Professor Kah would like to address. But I would like to take one question from Secretary-General ITU, John Omo.

>> Sorry I came in late. A question on Article 19. I think there's a sense in which standardization has gained some ground in terms of accommodating and respecting human rights, particularly, you know, gender inclusivity, which is a great thing.

But there's increasing worry in terms of standardization also attempting to homogenize, if I can use that word, irrespective of the fact that cultural and social rights are human rights, irrespective of where they are, they are human rights. And in an attempt to use standardization or to homogenize, universalize certain practices is one that is worrying. And I don't know how, you know, I liked the idea of inclusiveness, the five aspects of coming up with standards in terms of openness, transparency. How we could bring back the fact that social and cultural rights are human rights and insofar as standardization in terms to try to, you know, go the world into the fact that if it is good for Europe, it is good for the world. I am using Europe as an example.

What would be your perspective?

>> MUHAMMADOU KAH: Thank you so much. Perhaps you missed my opening point. And in that, the premise was, actually, the centrality of cultural and social context and adaptability. And those voices to be part of the ecosystem of configuring the architecture of standards and how it is embedded. Because when most of these technologies were designed and created, the voices and inputs on context, and especially the cultural and social aspect was not factored much.

So, I think it's, sort of, linked to the earlier question that this has to be approached on a multisector approach, where you have all actors' voices captured to ensure that the centrality of humanity in the design, in the requirements of emerging technologies are factored.

without which, we cannot protect human rights. Cultural and social human rights even in a nondigital world, it is increasingly a challenge for the Human Rights Council, the right of social culture.

Your point, I think, is really on point, that it is essential, that it is not one glove fits all. It's a collective effort so that we can be able to have technologies that have standards that are adaptable and usable.

I even mentioned in the early days before even this issue of human rights, human factors was essential in the design of technologies, where we think of the gender and I don't think enough is done in gendering in the standards of technology. Also the use of technology where you have elderly and disability and the access to information. Those rights have not been factored by the authors these technologies. And I think having a collective multisector actors and using the convening power of ITU and its mechanism to provide the leadership on that can go a long way to address those issues.

>> BILEL JAMOSSI: Thank you very much, Ambassador.

Maybe we will take one more, maybe two more questions, if David has one. If not, I would like start with this gentleman. If you can introduce yourself, please and ask your question.

>> AUDIENCE: Okay. Hello, good morning. I'm Sekou Barry, the General Director for the Regulation in Republic of Guinea. So, I am going to be addressing my remark in French.

The question will be more for the whole panel.
(non-English language).

>> BILEL JAMOSSI: Thank you very much. I'm not sure if there is interpretation, but the essence --

>> AUDIENCE: I guess I have to say in English.

>> BILEL JAMOSSI: Concisely, please.

>> AUDIENCE: This topic is all since back in the Renaissance in French, we remember the philosophy mentioned that (?) and if we interpret that in today's topic, we are talking about the human right, we are talking about the standardization.

My question is, do we feel like the different state or the UN or the different organization that are protecting the human right are doing enough to protect us, not against, but let's say against and with the different technological advancement that we are seeing? Because this

in reality, today we are talking about digitalization, but it apply all across from weapon to what we are discussing today. We keep on inventing but are all of those organizations doing enough really for us to feel protected? Thank you.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you very much. I will take David's question and then we go to Vidushi and any of the other panelists and then we will wrap up. Thank you. David.

>> AUDIENCE: Thank you, Bilel. I guess I will make up my question on the spot but maybe you have caught me. Thank you very much. I was just going to say, I think this is an interesting conversation because there was also similar session held at the Human Rights Council not too long ago. A slightly different panel. Largely CSO driven. But nevertheless much of the same conversation during that.

So, I guess the point that they made was, I think it's the access question, which was really, I think, one that framed the whole thing. I was a bit surprised to hear that Nokia was a member of 300 plus standard bodies, which, sort of, surprised me but speaks to the amplitude of the situation, which is CSOs don't have the natural ability to be all places all the time everywhere.

I have heard, obviously, ISO, IEC speak a bit. I am curious reflections of are there working methods that need to be improved or is there low hanging fruit that I think this is what Peggy's report will get to, low-hanging fruit that can, actually, help advance the file in terms of bringing voices into these organizations. Obviously, the ITU, it isn't necessarily the broadest stakeholder community for honest, resolution failed to involve industry. So who is around the table at the ITU matters. So, perhaps, that's really the question.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Very good. Thank you very much. Vidushi, please.

>> VIDUSHI MARDA: Thank you. I am going to take this opportunity to maybe answer both questions about the role of standards bodies and what needs to be done. And I think the homogeneity question is an important one. If we think of technology as not just a technical system. It is a social technical systems. While standards bodies can talk about robustness, safety, ensure compliance with human rights standards, the actual use of technologies in societies are also determined by other factors such as institutional realities, the particular social context, so

on and so forth. And I think it's helpful to also have a distinction between what standards bodies can do have a mandate to do versus not.

There is a very clear responsibility to respect existing human rights standards, to ensure that all of the work that comes out of standards bodies is in compliance with human rights standards.

But standards bodies don't elaborate on what compliance with human rights standards can look like. So, the leadership of what particular human rights compliance looks like in Gambia versus India, versus Sri Lanka, versus Germany is determined by other stakeholders that go much beyond standards bodies.

So, I think keeping that mandate in mind can be helpful and that also answers, I think, partly your question on whether standards bodies are doing enough. I don't think the mandate of standards bodies is to do everything. It is various unique and particular kind of expectation that we have. And I think in terms of human rights the basic expectation it has to be in compliance and respectful of human rights standards.

>> BILEL JAMOSSI: Thank you very much, Vidushi. Yes? And then other panelists, if they want to address the questions posed and then we will have to wrap up.

>> GILLES THONET: Very quickly on the working methods. I think that's a really key question. And this is definitely on our agenda. I guess both ISO, ITU, IEC, we are reviewing a working method to try to be more inclusive, to be more -- engage more stakeholders. I will just mention one example that we experimented, we created a couple of years back at the IEC and also adopted by ISO, is the concept of standardization evaluation groups, which are fully open groups.

Those groups are totally open to anyone who want to join. And that's really where we look at, kind of, hot topics for standardization. And we did that a couple of years back on ethics and artificial intelligence. We had people from completely different backgrounds, journalists, sociologists, even people interested in religions. And they really took part in the process of defining new parameters for standardization.

So, yes, it is important, we are looking at some potentially new mechanism. No, of course, perhaps we need to do more and that's also, kind of, a learning journey for us. Thank you.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you. Ambassador.

>> MUHAMMADOU KAH: Yeah, thank you so much. I don't think we have much time to delve into, to unpack this very important questions, but all I would add is the true multilateral and government administered bodies open standard-setting bodies will allow collaboration to venues that can consider broadly privacy risks, for example, and protections looking beyond solve lens and the encryption of sensitive data, for example.

The second point is the standard-setting bodies that was mentioned earlier can have systems that welcome and introduce newer participants, to capture all voices. This is very, very crucial, especially for the under-represented areas of the world on the accessibility point that you have raised.

The government, the private sector are crucial. Civil society are crucial to maintain a stake in the determination of these digital technologies without the economic-driven model of it to ensure that implementation and the governance of it is also factored.

The other point that I wanted to -- what I wanted to add to the question is the importance of smart regulations and legislation. That should be used to define goals and requirements while standard-setting can be used on the ground expertise and multistakeholder engagement. So, it's not a very simple answer. Critical designers, for example, they can play an important role.

So it's a multifaceted action that will be needed. I don't think it is as simple as relegating it to the role of the Human Rights Council, for example. The Human Rights Council have a central role to ensure that all rights are protected and all mechanisms are used by this collective multistakeholder engagement.

>> BILEL JAMOUSSEI: Thank you very much. In terms of the access question, very briefly from the ITU perspective, of course. It's a UN organization. It's unique in the sense of having private sector academia as members and also, nongovernmental organizations. So from a participation perspective, it's a fairly wide open multistakeholder participation. And there's always the option of the Chairman inviting experts to meetings. The focus groups in the standardization sector are fully open. You don't have to be a member to participate.

So, from accessing the process of the standards development, it is wide open, and it is quite unique by

having the private sector directly act as well as academia and SMEs.

From also access to the final product, the ITU standards are available free of charge in PDF form on the ITU website. Once they are published, they are freely available. Anyone can download them. And sometimes in multiple languages. Often in English, but also in multiple languages.

So, the process is very clear. It has been around for close to 160 years. The ITU was founded to be a standards organization of the International Telegraph Union and has evolved with the technologies to be able to include governments, private sector, academia and NGOs in the process.

In terms of the high-level principle, of course, the Human Rights Council Resolution is something that every UN organization takes into account. So, we already have the basis for that interplay between standards and human rights, and that's why we took the initiative this year to invite the High Commissioner to be the keynote for our world standards cooperation to make sure that the dialogue is inclusive of ITU, ISO and IEC. And then through that, we agreed as an action from WSC to take the conversation to the leaders of the study groups and technical committees, the chair men that are leading the standards development activity to be aware of not only the technical viability and the economic viability of standards, but also the human rights, widening the lens, as Peggy mentioned.

So, with that brief answer quickly to David in terms of access to the process and also to the standards, I would like to turn it over to Peggy to really summarize our session and then thank you very much. Thank you.

>> PEGGY HICKS: Thanks very much. And given that we are way over time, I won't spend too much time summarizing, but really grateful for the very rich and vibrant conversation we have had and maybe just to pick up some of the questions on the conclusions which I think do pull it together. I think the question that was asked about bringing in social and cultural rights in different contexts is a really important one. And I think it's really crucial to say that's part of why we press so much for this conversation around human rights. Because the reality is, it is the human rights framework that's been universally agreed and which does incorporate the full set of rights. It's not just civil and political. It's

economic, social and cultural rights, all with equal value, all indivisible and needing to be brought to the table.

So, that's part of how we see human rights as an important tool within these conversations. And without juxtaposing the two, because I think they each have their roles, it's part of why we like to expand a bit beyond ethics at times as well, because ethical context conversations can sometimes bring on those different cultural contexts and things in different ways than in, perhaps, a human rights perspective would.

That said, doing it across the human rights framework does not mean that the answers are the exact same in every place, right? You do need to understand, you know, how these things play out. So, one of the things that we have really worked on, for example, and it will be interesting to look at this in a standard-setting context, is that we are working with national statistical commissions around the SDGs and making the national statistical commissions and the national human rights institutions that exist within countries have never really had communication across them.

So, what would it look like to have those that are responsible for standard development and standard implementation within each national context, have an ongoing conversation with national human rights institutions. That type of conversation, of recognizing the global framework, but then also, you know, how we bring this down to the national and local level, I think, will be really important.

I did want to, then take up the point you asked from Guinea a bit about are we doing enough. I think the reality is, no one in the room -- well, I shouldn't speak for everyone. My expectation is everybody could agree that the system at the global, regional, national level simply does not have the sufficient metabolism to keep up with what's happening in the space. We don't have the tools. We don't have the structures in place to allow us to do it as well as we would all like. I think that applies across stakeholders. It's a governmental problem. Governments need to bring in the expertise, the bodies and things. But it's the companies, obviously, are failing in different ways and we as international organizations need to figure out how we adapt, innovate, to meet the challenges we face in the digital world.

And we have opportunities to do that coming up. I

think the Secretary-General has put on the table this is a fundamental challenge within our common agenda and the work that's being done by the facilitators within that process around a Global Digital Compact and the Summit of the Future, I think will be really important opportunities to try to set that ambition and to move things forward at a faster pace that really meets the challenges that we see.

And then just finally, coming back to this issue of what are the next steps, I really loved Vidushi's summary of the points and I won't even try to replicate it. But I think going back to that issue of the high-level policy commitment and what it looks like in practice, I think there is -- I mean, I think we have moved forward where we can have this conversation. We have each of the organizations at the table saying, we understand the importance of this, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it will deliver the results that we as standard-setting or development organizations need. But, you know, what does that mean in terms of what types of improvements, what types of processes can we grow and incentivize in different ways to make things improve.

And I think that will differ, of course, from body to body and place to place. But that is the, sort of, output we want from the report that we are going to be presenting in June, is very specific conversations about what will it take to move from the level we are at, where there's a commitment and engagement and some practices, which are really helpful, to the next level where we have a better approach that addresses the five points that Vidushi put on the table. And that means learning from each other, bringing in different practices.

I think that question of incentives is really important. These are not things that happen on their own. We need to encourage and recognize when things are done well, take up the practices like the standards evaluation group that you mentioned and look at how can we make those things happen better and more effectively across the standards setting sector as a whole. Thanks very much.

>> BILEL JAMOSSI: Thank you very much. With that, I would like to thank you for your participation and for bearing with us for an additional 20 minutes or so. And this is really a kickoff to the conversation. So, let's continue the journey and the challenges, the next steps as Peggy mentioned.

with that, bon appetit.

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