

African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms Coalition Strategic Plan for 2019-2022 v.4.1

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1. About this document

As part of a project called “Securing human rights online in Africa through a strong and active ‘African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms’ network”,¹ the Secretariat of the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms² Coalition (AfDec Coalition) developed a 36-month strategic plan (for the period 1 April 2019 to 22 April 2022) with milestones against which progress can be monitored.

This first step in developing this strategy was a meeting of the Secretariat and 15 Coalition members held in Entebbe, Uganda, from 18 to 20 February 2019. The meeting took stock of AfDec achievements since the Declaration’s launch in 2014, analysed current challenges, and developed a draft strategic plan aimed at strengthening the Secretariat and the Coalition so that they are able to more effectively work with the Declaration in order to achieve a rights-respecting internet environment in Africa. This draft strategy was made available to Coalition members, some of whom provided input online, with others engaging with it in detail at a validation workshop held in Lagos on 23 April, alongside Paradigm Initiative’s Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum. This version includes online comment and the input made at the validation workshop.

2. Context

It has been six years since the launch of the process to draft an African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms in Nairobi in 2013 as a “Pan-African initiative to promote human rights standards and principles of openness in Internet policy formulation and implementation on the continent”,³ and five years since the launch of the first version of the Declaration at the 2014 Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

Much has changed since then. And much has not. On the one hand, awareness of the importance of protecting internet rights and freedoms in Africa has increased dramatically. So has internet rights-related research, monitoring and capacity building. Achievement of note includes the 2016 African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) resolution on

1 <https://www.apc.org/en/project/securing-human-rights-online-africa-through-strong-and-active-african-declaration-internet>

2 The Secretariat of the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms is comprised of the Association for Progressive Communications, Media Foundation West Africa and Media Rights Agenda.

3 <https://africaninternetrights.org/about/>

the Right to Freedom of Information and Expression on the Internet in Africa,⁴ and the inclusion of human rights in the African Union Commission's Declaration on Internet Governance.⁵

But what has not changed, and has to some extent escalated, are the fear-driven efforts by African states to control use of the internet; to shut it down or block parts of it. Shutdowns have in fact increased, and new forms of control have emerged. These include taxes and tariffs on social media; cybersecurity legislation that criminalises speech and justifies mass or arbitrary surveillance; and requirements for bloggers to register or apply for licences. Another disturbing development is the increase in online misogyny and harassment of women and girls, as well as misinformation and hate speech, often encouraged or initiated by governments or political parties. Digital divides still exist and in some ways are widening. Governments are embracing digital identity programmes, mostly without data protection frameworks being in place. In other words, the African Declaration is even more relevant now than it was in 2014.

3. Goals

Overall goal

AfDec's overall long-term goal is for national and regional internet-related policy frameworks across Africa to promote and respect human rights and for the Declaration to be used as a guide and reference document in internet-related law and policy making in Africa – both at national level as well as sub-regional and regional levels.

Intermediate objectives

To contribute to achieving the overall goal, the Coalition will focus on achieving the following objectives over the coming two years:

- (i) The African Declaration Secretariat and Coalition have the capacity to effectively promote and coordinate uptake and use of the Declaration across Sub-Saharan Africa.
- (ii) The African Declaration Secretariat and Coalition collaborate with civil society actors, human rights defenders and media groups to influence regional and global internet-related policy processes to help ensure that they respect human rights online.
- (iii) The African Declaration Secretariat and Coalition members and partners respond to rights violations and implement actions towards making national internet regulation and policy frameworks in Africa respect human rights.

⁴ "Taking note of the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms, which was developed by a coalition of African civil society organizations and adopted during the 9th Internet Governance Forum in Istanbul, Turkey, in September 2014, which elaborates on the principles which are necessary to uphold human and people's rights on the Internet, and to cultivate an Internet environment that can best meet Africa's social and economic development needs and goals."

<http://www.achpr.org/sessions/59th/resolutions/362>

⁵ "8. Recalling the commitment of member states to promote and protect fundamental freedoms, especially the right to freedom of expression and access to information (on and offline), and human and peoples' rights enunciated in instruments of the African Union and of the United Nations and recognizing that these rights must be upheld online as well as offline."

https://www.afifg.africa/sites/default/files/DeclarationonInternetGovernance_adoptedAUSummit2018.pdf

4. Strategies to achieve the long-term goal

To achieve the long-term goal of the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms Coalition, the following six overlapping strategies will be used at the level where most impact can be achieved: national, sub-regional, regional or international:

Strategies	How this strategy will help achieve the longer-term goal
a) Awareness raising	Even though awareness of the Declaration has grown enormously since its launch in 2014, it is still not widespread enough. Many human rights defenders (HRDs) are not internet specialists, and even though they are increasingly dependent on the internet to do their work, they are not aware of the extent to which this ability is under threat. Governments make internet-related policy that violates international human rights agreements which they have committed to uphold. Meanwhile, other stakeholders, such as business and the technical community, are concerned when the internet is shut down, and they are not aware of the human rights mechanisms and agreements that can be used to challenge these shutdowns. By building more awareness, the AfDec Coalition will work towards ensuring that more people, institutions and organisations are aware of the importance of internet rights and how the principles in the African Declaration can be used as a guide for assessing and developing policy, regulation and the general internet environment from a rights-based perspective. By building the awareness of online rights among policy actors such as regulators and national and intergovernmental ICT-related institutions the Coalition can contribute to increasing their institutional effectiveness. Such awareness raising should take the form of targeted engagement with these institutions.
b) Research, monitoring and responding to violations and affirming good practices	Over the years, national and regional monitoring, analysis and research have mapped internet developments in the region, including its usage, governance and regulation and violations of online rights. While this has gone a long way in mapping trends on the continent, there is a need for more strategic research that is focused on the principles on which the Declaration is based. ⁶ At regional level, monitoring and research are needed to hold governments, intergovernmental institutions like the African Union, and corporations accountable for upholding the rights they claim to support. At national level, through the AfDec Coalition using a standard methodology and framework for analysing national environments, more recognition of the Declaration will be achieved. There will also be a deeper understanding of national contexts, and how best to respond to those contexts.
c) Capacity building	In order to increase and amplify policy advocacy efforts that advance internet rights, the AfDec Coalition will implement capacity-building initiatives among relevant stakeholders. Capacity building will be integrated wherever possible with d) Policy advocacy, described below. This will ensure an increase in the number of people and institutions with a good knowledge of the overall internet governance context and ecosystem and an understanding of internet rights. It will also increase the usage of national, regional and international human rights mechanisms.
d) Policy advocacy	Participating in policy processes is a good way of building capacity, and is also a prerequisite for influencing policy outcomes. So is engaging policy influencers, such as, among others, parliamentarians, the judiciary, national human rights institutions, industry associations, regulators and other actors with relevant skills and expertise. By engaging in policy advocacy based on the principles in the Declaration, the coalition will seek to influence policy outcomes, increase awareness on internet rights, and build regional networks that will support the network through actions that include statements and resolutions. Policy advocacy can include campaigning for, or against specific policy and regulation.
e) Legal advocacy	Courts can be a valuable tool to challenge laws or actions that are inconsistent with rights respecting legal frameworks. Civil society in Africa has begun using legal advocacy, including strategic litigation, to challenge internet shutdowns in Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, and to adjudicate the constitutionality of restrictive internet legislation, such as in Kenya. This strategy aims to build on these efforts and support civil society organisations to identify and prioritise cases, navigate court procedures, develop interventions, identify partners/ lawyers and engage in advocacy before and after filing cases. It may include interventions in national, sub-regional, and regional courts.
f) Network building and partnership	A strong coalition that is well networked with others in civil society, particularly HRDs, as well as with government, businesses and the technical and academic communities builds sustainability and creates the pre-conditions for responding to threats and violations.

⁶ A coalition member in Cameroon, PROTEGE QV, used the Declaration as a basis for assessing the national internet rights environment. They found this very valuable and are willing to share their research framework with others. <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/watching-cameroon-through-lenses-african-declaration-internet-rights-and-freedoms>

5. Planned activities and timelines

To meet our goal and objectives, during the 2019-2020 period, the following activities will be undertaken:

Activity	When?	By whom?	Deliverable	Expected outcome – what will change?
a) Awareness raising				
National, sub-regional, regional and international awareness raising through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convening panels or discussions at national and regional internet governance forums • A workshop at the Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum in Lagos • Sessions at the Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa (FIFAfrica) • A session at the ACHPR NGO Forum 	Ongoing during 2019, 2020 and 2021 April 2019 and 2020 September 2019 in Ethiopia and 2020 (venue TBC) April 2020	Members of the Coalition Members of the Secretariat Partner institutions, e.g. national human rights institutions, media organisations, etc.	National: Targeted awareness-raising campaigns Sessions at national IGFs Sub-regional: Session at the West African IGF in July Regional: Panels on shutdowns and other relevant issues at technical community events such as the annual African Internet Summit. At least 1 workshop at the ACHPR NGO Forum in the 2019-2021 period Interventions/activities at the regional IGF in 2019, 2020 and 2021 International: Workshops at the annual global IGF Participation in the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) event in Accra in February 2020 and working as closely as possible with the government of Ghana while they are FOC chair to get more African Governments to commit to internet freedoms and join the FOC Workshop at RightsCon in Tunis 2019 on taxing social media and an event on how to work around shutdowns (Discotech) Workshops at RightsCon in 2020 and 2021 – topic to be determined	National stakeholders (governments, civil society, media, etc.) are aware of the Declaration, the ACHPR resolution and the ACHPR Declaration on Freedom of Expression (being revised in 2019) and leverage them to protect and promote internet rights. More African governments join the FOC. Increased support and action from the technical community on protecting and promoting internet rights in Africa. Consistent use by digital rights activists in Africa of the AfDec as a framework for advocacy and accountability.
Launch an award to (dis)honour African governments based on AfDec compliance, e.g. at the Freedom Online Coalition meeting or at a side-event at the IGF or RightsCon.	2019, 2020 and 2021	Secretariat and members	An annual AfDec award for 1) an African government where evidence of compliance with the AfDec principles is notable and 2) an African government that demonstrated notable lack of compliance in the calendar year	Greater awareness of the Declaration and how it can be applied. Positive reinforcement for states that respect rights and exposure of governments that don't. Media coverage of AfDec and what it stands for.
b) Research, monitoring and responding to violations and affirming good practices				
Agree on a common template for doing research to “assess” national internet rights contexts.	At the validation workshop on 23 April 2019	Secretariat and coalition members	Agreed research strategy and framework	Coalition members will have a common framework for assessing internet rights in national contexts.

Conduct national internet rights assessments	May 2019 to April 2022	Coalition members	Country assessments in at least 10 countries by January 2020	Deeper understanding of what specific national contexts are, and how best to respond to those contexts.
Scope out countries with progressive and open internet policies and standards, especially those that have had a positive effect on the economy (for benchmarking purposes)	May 2019 to April 2022	Coalition members	Examples of "better practices" for internet policy and regulation that can be used for research and policy advocacy purposes. A complementary output of this research can include publishing an internet rights index which can contribute to more awareness of the AfDec principles.	Deeper understanding of internet policy and regulatory frameworks that contribute to an enabling environment for economic development.
Make use of human rights mechanisms to document and report on violations of internet rights in Africa	<p>UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR)</p> <p>Kenya (report due 18 July 2019/review Jan/Feb 2020)</p> <p>Liberia, Malawi, Libya (report due 3 October 2019/review May 2020)</p> <p>Mauritania, Rwanda (report due 19 March 2020/review Oct-Nov 2020)</p> <p>Namibia, Niger, Mozambique, Somalia, Sierra Leone (report due 18 June 2020/review Jan-Feb 2021)</p> <p>Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, Eswatini (report due 24 Sept. 2020/review (Apr-May 2021)</p> <p>Togo, Zimbabwe, Uganda, South Sudan (report due 18 March 2021/review Oct-Nov 2021)</p> <p>Human Rights Committee:</p> <p>Mauritania, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea (report due 3 June 2019/review July 2019)</p> <p>Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:</p>	Coalition members	<p>National: Report violations to national human rights institutions</p> <p>Regional: Submit reports/complaints to the ACHPR in response to country reviews</p> <p>International: Shadow reports and advocacy for UPR and treaty body reviews</p>	<p>Recommendations from authoritative human rights mechanisms to improve internet rights at the national level, engagement in dialogue with governments on internet rights.</p> <p>Stronger networks/coalitions of NGOs working to advance internet rights through engaging with international mechanisms.</p>

	Senegal (report due 6 September 2019/review 30 Sep-18 Oct 2019)			
c) Capacity building				
Capacity building workshops with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRDs, CSOs, social justice advocates • The African Union Commission • Women's rights groups • Media groups/journalists and freedom of information advocates • Parliamentarians and relevant ICT institutions • Members of the judiciary • National human rights institutions and consumer rights groups • Data protection agencies (this will take place at the ACHPR to deepen their understanding of the relationship between data protection and human rights) 	Ongoing	Secretariat and Coalition members and partners	At least two capacity-building events per year Create an online learning section on the Declaration's website with relevant materials and resources	Increased knowledge among relevant national stakeholders of internet rights and how to secure them. At least two national human rights institutions adopt the Declaration as a standard/use it in their work. Development of data protection legislation integrates human rights.
Partnership with the African School on Internet Governance (AfriSIG) to build capacity within the Coalition in internet governance	AfriSIG 2019 and 2020	Secretariat	Participation of at least two persons from the AfDec Coalition in AfriSIG	Increased capacity in the Coalition to engage in internet policy, governance and regulatory processes to advance internet rights.
d) Advocacy				
Engage parliaments on legislation including at the proposal stage of bills (e.g. through portfolio committees)	May 2019 to April 2022	Coalition members	Parliamentarians in at least 3 countries engaged on legislation relevant for internet rights	Legislation impacting internet rights is informed by and reflects the principles contained in the African Declaration.
Engage state actors on the need for policy and legislative reforms	May 2019 to April 2022	Coalition members	National: Stakeholder analysis and mapping, meetings with policy influencers	Announcements of intended reforms to needed for the protection and promotion of digital rights.
Participate in the development of the revised Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa at the ACHPR	April 2019 to April 2020	Coalition members	An updated Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression that integrates digital rights effectively	Commission adopt the revised Declaration at its next ordinary session in Banjul in October/November 2019. Consolidating the protection of internet rights in regional human rights mechanisms and institutions.
Policy brief on "fourth industrial revolution" and emerging trends from the perspective of the principles of the AfDec	By December 2019	Secretariat	Policy brief that highlights how the current preoccupation in Africa with the so-called "fourth industrial revolution" can integrate human rights, and why this is so important (e.g. with regard to data protection)	Coalition members are able to make the argument at national level for "fourth industrial revolution" strategies having to comply with internet rights.
Engage national, subregional and regional	Ongoing	Coalition members and	Presentations at telecoms events on	Telecommunications regulators are more aware of

telecommunications agencies (e.g. the AU, WATRA, CRASA, COMESA) on shutdowns/taxes		Secretariat	the harmful impact of shutdowns and social media taxes	rights frameworks and how they can use these frameworks, as well as why they need to comply with them.
National follow-up on reports submitted to and outcomes of country reviews at the ACHPR and the HRC or treaty bodies	Ongoing	Members	Advocacy and outreach and follow-up on the outcomes of reviews of countries' compliance with human rights (e.g. the Universal Periodic Review, ACHPR review or country reviews by treaty bodies)	Integration of internet rights into broader human rights monitoring and advocacy. Human rights defenders and institutions have internet rights on their radar.
Advocate for a Resolution on one or more of the emerging threats based on the AfDec principles at the ACHPR	October/November 2019, April/May 2020, October/November 2020, April/May 2021, October/November 2021, April/May 2022	Members and Secretariat ACHPR special rapporteur on freedom of expression	ACHPR resolution	Greater attention to internet rights by the African human rights community and mechanisms.
Issue statements and petitions against digital rights violations	Ongoing	Secretariat	Periodic statements against continued digital rights violations and relevant issues and trends.	Increased awareness of the Declaration and other relevant regional and international declarations, agreements and frameworks that uphold human rights online.
e) Legal advocacy				
Strategic litigation	May 2019 – April 2022	Members	Legal advocacy including litigation against violations, practices and legal provisions that hinder the enjoyment of digital rights, using national, sub-regional, and regional courts and mechanisms	Reform and implementation of laws that recognise, protect and promote rights online.
f) Network building and partnership				
Consolidate, revive and grow Coalition membership	April to July 2019 (consolidation) July 2019 onwards (growth)	Secretariat	New mailing lists Revamped website Strategic plan agreed on and validated by members with their commitment to help implement it Membership procedure Small grant programme	A revitalised, engaged and growing network of individuals and organisations.
Partnership building with key networks and institutions from civil society and other stakeholder groups, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none">African Union CommissionIFEX and AFEXInternet Society (ISOC)Internet service providers and their associationsLocal access providers/community networksOpen source and techie networks like FOSSFA and AfriChix	Ongoing	Secretariat and members	Jointly convened events Consultations Collaboratively implemented projects	Collaboration and networking on internet rights that extends beyond "preaching to the converted".

6. Role players and stakeholders

Specific role players and stakeholders	Stakeholder group	What role they are playing now	What role they should play in future	AfDec role
Leadership of AU summit	Government/intergovernmental	Some shut down or block parts of the internet. Others do not denounce this.	Adopt a progressive resolution on social media and internet shutdowns. Make positive statements.	Advocacy
Members of the AU (Pan African Parliament)	Government/intergovernmental	Not playing any visible role at the moment.	Provide supportive statements and take supportive steps in support of a resolution. Promote policy and legislation in their own countries that prohibit social media and internet shutdowns and provide role models.	Advocacy
Regional bodies (e.g. ACHPR and UNECA)	Government/Intergovernmental	Not playing any visible role at the moment.	Provide supportive statements and take steps in support of a resolution.	Advocacy
African CSOs	Civil society	Limited national and regional response on internet shutdowns.	Lead campaign against shutdowns.	Awareness raising (share campaign messages, networking and capacity building, organise campaign actions)
African media	Civil society	Low media coverage of internet developments and their impact on rights.	Increase civic education and support through informative reportage and advance the campaign.	Supply information, articles that support the campaign
Internet service providers and mobile network operators (MNOs)	Private sector/technical community	They are silent on rights violations (but concerned about the business impact)	Support the campaign and participate in it	Advocacy
Ordinary citizens	Civil society	Largely unaware of the advocacy issue	Support the campaign and participate in it.	Awareness raising

7. How this plan will be implemented

African Declaration Strategic Advocacy Fund	The African Declaration Strategic Advocacy Fund is a rolling fund that will disburse grants up to USD 10,000, to a total value of USD 100,000 to coordinate and implement at least 10 national and regional advocacy (campaigning, analysis and research) interventions or activities to influence strategic internet regulation and policy or respond to violations.
A strong and active Secretariat	A strong and active Secretariat coordinates and supports the work of the Coalition, by convening regular meetings (online and face-to-face), attends to its technical, administrative and communications needs, and coordinates implementation of the strategic plan, communications strategy, and Strategic Advocacy Fund to support and amplify the activities and impact of the Coalition. The Secretariat will also take a lead in identifying and establishing regional and global networks in line with the objectives of the network.
Collaborative and distributed actions including working groups	It is only through member action that the AfDec will have impact. Many AfDec members are already actively implementing internet rights activities as part of their core programmes. Through connecting the efforts of the network, the sum of its impact will be much greater. Similarly, the efforts of members of the Coalition can be strengthened by drawing on the resources and expertise of the Coalition network. Working groups will be formed from among the members of the Coalition to coordinate specific strategies, such as, for example, a communications

	working group, a capacity-building working group and an advocacy working group.
Communications strategy	<p>Implementation will make use of a variety of communication tools, channels and activities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website development and updating • Statements, press releases and publication of articles • Organisation of and participation in conferences and other events • Liaison with other relevant initiatives • Social media updates and network building • Production of printed and online material • Face-to-face meetings. <p>The communication plan will be implemented by the Secretariat and members of the Coalition and will support members' communication activities. For this purpose, a communication toolbox will be developed containing a core set of guidelines and materials.</p>
Resource mobilisation	The Secretariat will undertake to secure resources to support its functioning in the longer term and to ensure that AfDec has a diversified funding stream for the network through grants, sponsorship, partnerships and collaborations.