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THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS DIGITAL RIGHTS ALLIANCE

The constant digitalization of several aspects of human life through digital technology poses significant risks to and impacts on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Understanding the potential and responding to the challenges that digital technology poses to human rights across different situations, is equally important to States, the private sector, and civil society organizations. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are uniquely placed in the nexus between public, private and non-commercial actors to ensure human rights protection and promotion. They do so by handling complaints from victims of human rights violations; monitoring human rights situations in their countries and reporting to their national Parliaments and UN treaty bodies; engaging in constructive dialogue with state officials and aiming to impact state policies, law implementation and enforcement to protect human rights. Yet, NHRIs' capacity to extend this work to include digital rights is still nascent.

BACKGROUND

The Digital Rights Alliance for NHRIs was initiated by The Danish Institute for Human Rights as an output of the Tech for Democracy initiative launched by the Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2021 following a dialogue with sister NHRIs, civil society organisations and other relevant actors. The Alliance represents one of the action coalitions established in the Tech for Democracy initiative and focuses on how NHRIs can realise their respective mandates in the context of digitalisation.

Digitalisation has strong human rights implications – both positive and negative as digital technologies find their way into many of the areas of society, e.g., as the use of facial recognition in policing; the use of AI based profiling models in individual case handling and recruitment in the public sector; information distribution through social media by authorities; internet banking and digital identity systems etc. These trends pose several human rights challenges, that human rights organisations, including NHRIs, need to address. However, the current state of NHRIs capacity requires them to strengthen their operations to fulfil their mandate in this area, which demands a new set of competences and approaches due to the technical particularities of new technologies.

Considering the challenges NHRIs face, the Alliance was established as an informal network of NHRIs interested in working towards strengthened human rights compliance of digital solutions and services. The Alliance gather tech interested NHRIs, provide a platform for peer learning; experience and idea exchange and joint efforts to enhance national implementation of initiatives aimed at strengthening the human rights compliance of digital technologies implications in respective member countries.

THE ALLIANCE ROLE

As public body institutions mandated by national states, NHRIs have a fundamental role to protect and promote human rights under the Paris Principles offline as well as online. To support the fulfilling of the members mandate in this area, the Alliance have the following functions:

- Provide a platform for NHRIs interested in tech to exchange ideas, experiences and knowledge on the human rights impacts of technologies
- Enable NHRIs to support each other in finding solutions to national human rights challenges related to digitalisation and increasing use of digital solutions in societies
- Develop methods and tools for NHRIs to realise their mandate in the context of digitalisation
- Strengthen NHRIs' presence and visibility during regional and global events relevant to tech and human rights, including through joint submissions to various international processes.
- Produce research and analysis on tech and human rights relating to NHRI mandate areas
- Support individual NHRIs in the national implementation of their activities related to tech and human rights

Moreover, the Alliance is currently developing a web resource that will help its members to define their role in protecting and promoting human rights digitally in compliance with the Paris Principles. The tool will be launched in April 2024.

OBJECTIVES

With the participation of representatives from NHRIs from around the globe, the Alliance has established a common goal to build the capacity of its members to fulfil their mandates in the digital sphere. Considering the diversity of contexts and experience in the field of human rights and digital technologies, the common goal is divided in three priorities:

- **Awareness-raising:** exposure to discussions of key topics which correlate to the impact of technology in human rights practice.
- **Capacity-building:** peer-learning events in the format of online and offline capacity building workshop and events to fulfil the priorities of the members within their mandate areas
- **Multi-stakeholder engagement:** Due to the scattered landscape in the field of human rights and technology, NHRIs are urged to engage with actors at national, regional, and international levels to pursue an overall picture and participation on regulatory and policy developments.

ACTIVITIES

The Alliance is moderated by the Danish Institute for Human Rights who acts as a facilitator of the following activities:

- Regular online meetings on different themes relevant to NHRIs
- Peer-learning events (physical and online)
- Development of learning tools
- Mailing list with regular information sharing among members
- Developing joint submissions to various international processes relating to technology.

MEMBERSHIP

Any NHRI with an interest in digital rights can become a member of the Alliance. And previous experience with the field is not a prerequisite. Staff members of the global and regional NHRI networks (GANNHRI, ENNHRI, APF, RINDCHA and NANHRI) are also welcomed to participate in the meetings and activities of the Alliance.

CONTACT

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