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UN: HUMAN RIGHTS APPLY ONLINE AS OFFLINE

The UN system is increasingly focusing on the importance and impact of technology for human rights and development. Since the first UN World Summit on the information society in 2003, the possibilities and challenges of technology for individuals' rights have been addressed in several standards and recommendations.

In 2003, the UN held the first World Summit on the information society. The aim of the summit was to develop a global vision for the use of technology and to ensure that technology contributes to meeting the UN's development goals. The first part of the summit was held in Geneva and covered a wide range of issues such as freedom of expression and privacy, the role of the media, infrastructure development and internet access.

The summit resulted in a joint declaration of principles, stressing that the development of the global information society should be based on the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

The summit differed from previous UN processes by involving both civil society and businesses in the preparations. The multi-stakeholder approach was adopted in recognition of the important role these actors have played in the development of the internet and which they continue to play in the governance of the internet as a global resource.

In 2005, the second part of the summit was held in Tunis. Here, the focus was on the technical and political control of the internet. The Tunis meeting resulted in a plan of action that, with 16 focus areas, amongst others, addressed access to the internet for all, development of infrastructure, privacy, e-commerce, e-health and e-learning. Also, it was decided to organise an annual Internet Governance Forum. The Tunis plan was last evaluated in Geneva in 2015.

HUMAN RIGHTS APPLY ONLINE
In 2012, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the first resolution stating that human rights apply both offline and online. The resolution was tabled by Sweden and unanimously adopted by the Human Rights Council's 47 countries with reservations from China and Cuba.

GROUND-BREAKING RESOLUTIONS

Since the 2003 Summit, the UN system has adopted several resolutions and reports concerning the relationship between technology and human rights. The documents set standards for the area.

In 2012, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the first resolution on human rights on the internet, with a focus on freedom of expression. Since then, several resolutions have been adopted, highlighting, for example, the role of freedom of expression for strengthening women's rights.

The right to privacy in the digital age has been the topic of several UN General Assembly resolutions, just as technology for development has been addressed. A core message is that technology must be used to promote sustainable local development, combat poverty and discrimination and strengthen vulnerable groups. The resolutions on the right to privacy express a deep concern about the increasingly intensive data collection and surveillance, and its impact on individuals' right to privacy across many sectors of society. It is also a concern that technology is being used to monitor and persecute human rights defenders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RAPPORTEURS

The UN special rapporteurs also increasingly focus on the impact of technology on human rights. The UN's special rapporteur on freedom of expression has emphasised that everyone must have access to and the skills to use technology, and he has warned against new forms of censorship, for example, through filters and the blocking of content. Most recently, the rapporteur has focused on digital platforms, including the use of algorithms and artificial intelligence

In 2015, the UN appointed a special rapporteur on the right to privacy. The rapporteur has called for a common global understanding of the right to privacy, pointed to challenges regarding the use of big data, and warned against state and commercial surveillance. In 2018, the UN special rapporteur on violence against women focused on online violence such as offensive materials, threats and hate speech. The rapporteur recommends, among other things, the development of effective and fast-responding complaints systems, to support victims of online violence.