*The following blog, co-authored by ICANN, [other members names here ] is intended to raise awareness and highlight the technical community’s concerns over the UN Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology’s (OSET) recent comments that appear*[[1]](#footnote-0) *to overlook an important distinction between the technical community and the civil society and their respective roles in the Internet Ecosystem.*

*The technical community is responsible for the development and functioning of the single interoperable Internet. As such, it should not be confused with the other stakeholders in the multistakeholder model of Internet Governance, which sets clear distinction between their roles and functions. It’s the cooperative balance between all of its stakeholders that keeps the Internet functioning.*

During the European Dialogue on Internet Governance, on 19 June 2023, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology (UN Tech Envoy) Ambassador Amandeep Gill stated, ””… This [the Digital Cooperation Forum] is a multistakeholder forum. So the preparation - tripartite, so those words are clearly used across civil society, which includes all the actors from the technical community, academia, and the value of scientific, independent scientific expertise, particularly around AI, that is clearly understood today, there is private sector and there is governments.” In other words, the UN Tech Envoy statement implied that there were only three groups - the private sector, the governments and civil society, under which everyone else is included.

To describe the technical community as part of the civil society is clearly against the agreed language from the WSIS process, which defined the roles and functions of each stakeholder engaged in the development of the Internet. If intentional, this statement is a significant step back from the achievements of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), namely the WSIS Tunis Agenda[[2]](#footnote-1) for the Information Society, as well as from the text of the WSIS+10 Review Outcome Document[[3]](#footnote-2).

The WSIS Tunis Agenda recognizes the different stakeholders and their roles, as stated in paragraph 35:

*35. We reaffirm that the management of the Internet encompasses both technical and public policy issues and should involve all stakeholders and relevant intergovernmental and international organizations. In this respect it is recognized that:*

1. *Policy authority for Internet-related public policy issues is the sovereign right of States. They have rights and responsibilities for international Internet-related public policy issues.*
2. *The private sector has had, and should continue to have, an important role in the development of the Internet, both in the technical and economic fields.*
3. *Civil society has also played an important role on Internet matters, especially at community level, and should continue to play such a role.*
4. *Intergovernmental organizations have had, and should continue to have, a facilitating role in the coordination of Internet-related public policy issues.*
5. *International organizations have also had and should continue to have an important role in the development of Internet-related technical standards and relevant policies.*

Furthermore, the WSIS Tunis Agenda continues, in paragraph 36:

*36. We recognize the valuable contribution by the academic and technical communities within those stakeholder groups mentioned in paragraph 35 to the evolution, functioning and development of the Internet.*

In other words, the academic and technical communities are specific stakeholders that contribute to the work of *each* of the groups mentioned in paragraph 35.

The WSIS+10 Outcome Document is even more specific, as it states several times that the technical community is different from the civil society, e.g.:

*3. We reaffirm, moreover, the value and principles of multi stakeholder cooperation and engagement that have characterized the World Summit on the Information Society process since its inception, recognizing that effective participation, partnership and cooperation of Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders, within their respective roles and responsibilities, especially with balanced representation from developing countries, has been and continues to be vital in developing the information society.*

The WSIS+10 Outcome Document further mentions the technical community in points 2, 12, 49, 57, 61, 66, and the welcoming paragraph.

In these foundational documents that recognize the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, there is no “tripartite” structure of the kind the UN Tech Envoy suggested. Furthermore, there is nothing setting out having only three participating groups in Internet Governance.

This “tripartite” concept was introduced in the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) Policy Brief,[[4]](#footnote-3) and Ambassador Gill expanded on it by providing a more detailed definition of what the Office of the Secretary-General Envoy on Technology (OSET) envisions. This concept seems to be based on a single mentioning of the word in the report[[5]](#footnote-4) by the High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (another body created by the UNSG). The report talks about inclusion and obligation of the private sector (recommendation 3, p. 18). And as for the technical community participation in these UN processes, the report mentions their “...regular, predictable and structured engagement from civil society, the private sector, academia and other technical entities, such as standards bodies…” (p. 41), and this is only used in the broader argumentation why a new body should be created under the UNSG umbrella - the Global Commission on Just and Sustainable Digitalization.

We express our support for the multistakeholder model of Internet Governance, which was discussed at length – with full participation of all stakeholders – during the two phases of the WSIS and is reflected in the Report of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG).[[6]](#footnote-5) The WGIG Report explains in detail the working and functioning of each of the “principle stakeholders” (see points 29 - 34 in the WGIG Report), explaining in particular that “...*the technical community and its organizations are deeply involved in Internet operation, Internet standard-setting and Internet services development*” (point 33). The Civil Society, on the other hand, has a distinct separate role as described in point 32.

While we are not in the position to influence an internal UN Secretariat process, we have an obligation not only to our communities, but to the smooth operation of the Internet that we provide, to kindly remind all involved in the Global Digital Compact process and all other Internet-related processes at the UN, that the technical functioning of the Internet is a result of a delicate and balanced multistakeholder effort.

As a result of the WSIS and the followup WSIS+10 the multistakeholder model of Internet governance is globally accepted as the best way for further deployment and development of the Internet.

Top-down attempts to break this balance, or to suggest eliminating or merging these critical stakeholder groups would be counterproductive and damaging to the critical technical functions that keep the Internet functioning in a secure, stable and resilient way.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RctcgFscohU&t=5831s> [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. WSIS Tunis Agenda - <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. WSIS+10 Outcome Document: <https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ares70d125_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F77%2FCRP.1%2FAdd.4&Language=E&DeviceType=Mobile&LangRequested=False> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. <https://highleveladvisoryboard.org/breakthrough/pdf/highleveladvisoryboard_breakthrough_fullreport.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. <http://www.wgig.org/WGIG-Report.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)