

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Embargoed for 16:01 GMT, 29 October 2008

AI Index: POL 30/009/2008

Amnesty International's involvement with the internet multi stakeholder initiative

Since mid-2006 Amnesty International, along with a number of major Internet, communication and technology (ICT) companies and human rights groups, has been involved in a multi stakeholder initiative (MSI) on human rights in the context of the Internet. The multi stakeholder process was established to develop a set of Principles and an Implementation and Governance framework (the Initiative) to guide companies in protecting rights to freedom of expression and privacy on the Internet.

In August 2008 all of the participants in MSI were sent the final texts of the Principles and associated implementation framework. Following careful consideration of these documents Amnesty International has come to the conclusion that, while they represent a degree of progress in responding to human rights concerns, they are not yet strong enough to allow Amnesty International to endorse them.

We are disappointed and concerned that weaknesses in the texts, which we repeatedly raised during the process, have not been addressed. In particular ambiguous language leaves, in our view, too many loopholes that would enable participant companies to circumvent or ignore their commitments under the Principles. Moreover, despite more than two years of intensive work by all participants, several critical issues could not be resolved, and have been deferred for further discussion. This has left considerable elements of compliance and scrutiny of compliance with the Initiative. For these reasons Amnesty International has decided that it cannot endorse the texts as they stand. To do so would, in our view, signal that the Initiative can make an adequate contribution to increasing protection of human rights. While the Initiative has taken positive steps, it has fallen well short of its potential.

Amnesty International will not continue to work within the MSI as it goes forward into a second phase. We have devoted considerable time and energy to the MSI over the past two years and no longer see a clear role for the organisation within the MSI. Although we will not continue as a formal member of the MSI, we have communicated our willingness to be called upon as an organisation external to the process to provide expert input or advice, if appropriate.

Multi stakeholder initiatives, such as the MSI on the Internet, can make a valuable contribution to protecting human rights. However, they can only do so if the commitments of participants are clear and there is a robust framework for compliance. Without clarity and the ability to hold companies to account, voluntary initiatives can become little more than public relations tools for some of their participants. Moreover, while voluntary approaches are useful, it is important to recognise that legislation is also necessary to protect human rights and ensure a level playing field for companies.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London

WC1X ODW, UK
www.amnesty.org