MANUSHYA
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#STOP DIGITAL DICTATORSHIP

JOINT OPEN LETTER

UNESCO GUIDELINES FOR REGULATING DIGITAL PLATFORMS: A THREAT TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC

31 May 2023
Chiang Mai, Thailand

Dear UNESCO,

We have been following your efforts to set out Guidelines for Regulating Digital Platforms with increasing alarm.

As representatives of civil society from across the Asia Pacific region, we have been at the forefront of the very type of abuse these guidelines set out to address. We know better than most the harmful role that tech platforms can play. We also understand how government overreach and over-regulation can result in even greater harm. In our region, these harms often work hand-in-hand, with authoritarianism on the rise and governments turning to tech platforms to advance their undemocratic agendas.

Rather than rein in big tech and safeguard human rights, we fear that the guidelines will:

1. *Rubber stamp local over-regulation*
   In our region, local regulation is regularly used to control and intimidate citizens. In practice, these guidelines will be used to justify increased regulation rather than better regulation.

2. *Embolden authoritarian regulators*
   Our regulators lack independence, capacity and human rights commitments. Empowering these regulators means handing over more power to undemocratic processes.

3. *Incentivise platforms to comply with illegitimate government requests*
   Companies are already caving to our governments regardless of the impact on human rights. The proposed UNESCO model risks accelerating this slide, providing companies greater cover to comply.

It does not appear that UNESCO has considered safeguards to protect against these significant risks.

We have raised our concerns with UNESCO, as have many of our peers - to no avail. Our voices are not getting heard.

We therefore urge UNESCO to:

1. Pause the current timeline.
2. Undertake an independent human rights impact assessment of the guidelines, inclusive of views and perspectives from civil society in authoritarian contexts.

We stand ready to engage with this assessment and explore safeguards and alternatives.

In anticipation of your response.

Sincerely,

🇦🇺 Australia
- OPTF

🇧🇩 Bangladesh
- Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum
- Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication
- Digitally Right

🇰🇭 Cambodia
- Cambodian Youth Network Association

🇮🇳 India
- Alternative Solutions for Rural Communities (ASORCOM)
- Software Freedom Law Center
- Swathanthra Malayalam Computing(SMC)

🇮🇩 Indonesia
- Combine Resource Institution
- Public Virtue Research Institute
- PurpleCode Collective
- Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet)
- Tifa Foundation

🇱🇦 Lao
- Manushya Foundation

🇲🇾 Malaysia
- Centre for Independent Journalism, Malaysia (CIJ)
- The IO Foundation
- KRYSS Network

🇲🇲 Myanmar
- Alternative Solutions for Rural Communities (ASORCOM)
- Athan - Freedom of Expression Activist Organization
- Digital Rights Collective
- Free Expression Myanmar
- Myanmar Internet Project

🇳🇵 Nepal
- Body & Data
- Digital Rights Nepal

🇵🇰 Pakistan
- Media Matters for Democracy
- Digital Rights Foundation

🇵🇭 Philippines
- DAKILA
- Filipino Freethinkers
- Foundation for Media Alternatives
- Human Rights Online Philippines (HRonlinePH)
- Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)

🇰🇷 South Korea
- Open Net

🇱🇰 Sri Lanka
- Hashtag Generation

🇹🇼 Taiwan
- Doublethink Lab

🇹🇭 Thailand
- Manushya Foundation
- Thai Netizen Network

Vietnam
- Viet Tan

🌏 Regional
- ASEAN Youth Forum
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
- Digital Rights Kashmir
- EngageMedia

🌏 Global Solidarity
- Access Now
- ARTICLE 19
- Association for Progressive Communications
- Electronic Frontier Foundation
- Global Voices Advox
- Internet Governance Project (IGP)
- SMEX
- Tribeless Youth
- WITNESS

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