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WSIS+20 REVIEW — Judith Hellerstein, IGF Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disabilities — ISOC.LIVE

Judith Hellerstein - Follow-up WSIS+20 Informal Stakeholder Consultation Session - 29 July 2025

Judith Hellerstein: Thank you so much to the ambassadors from Albania and Kenya, the two WSIS+20 co-facilitators, and also to the Informal Multistakeholder Sounding Board for holding this important consultation. My name is Judith Hellerstein, and I will be speaking as one of the two coordinators of the IGF Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability.

The position of IGF-DCAD is that despite the years of advocacy, the digital divide facing persons with disability is only mentioned tangentially throughout the WSIS+20 Elements paper. Persons with disabilities are one of the largest minorities. Unfortunately, when it comes to their participation in Internet governance discussions, their number is extremely small.

What does this mean? This means that in the 20 years of IGF discussions, although every IGF has had sessions and discussions on persons with

disabilities, few persons with disabilities actually participate in these discussions, and even fewer actually come in person to the IGF.

I pose this question: Are we building the capacities in the right manner? Is there something else we can do? What do we need to change this?

We need to change the mindset, not just of the people coming to the Internet governance events, but also to the organizers of these events. We need to increase the awareness of everyone involved in creating and producing the knowledge in a way where it is made accessible for people who access the knowledge differently. So, the question that these knowledge producers need to ask themselves is whether that knowledge will be accessible to persons with disability or not.

What we have said in our comments to the Elements paper, and what we are saying today, and we hope that the co-facilitators better understand, is that it is essential to fund and develop accessible training materials co-created with people with lived experience of disability, set diversity targets for disability representation and leadership, including in the IGF MAG, create mentorship pathways for persons with disabilities, leveraging the lived experience of disability to inform leadership development and participation in Internet governance, and integrate disability indicators into capacity building monitoring frameworks.

The WSIS+20 review presents a historic opportunity to move beyond tokenism and enshrine digital accessibility at the heart a truly inclusive information society. Without explicit commitments and concrete actions for persons with disabilities, and without the active leadership of people with lived experience with disability, the vision of the universal, meaningful, and affordable access cannot be realized.

As one of the coordinators of the IGF-DCAD, I urge the co-facilitators and all stakeholders to ensure that accessibility and the inclusion of people with disability are not afterthoughts, but they are core priorities reflected throughout the WSIS+20 outcome documents, and the future mandate of the IGF. Only by doing so can we build a multi-stakeholder inclusive governance model that serves the needs of all people and sets a precedent for equitable global digital policymaking.

Thank you so much for allowing me the time to make the statement.