RightsCon
Online ▸ 2020

OUTCOMES REPORT

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Celebrating RightsCon Online

7,681 PARTICIPANTS

157 COUNTRIES

309 SESSIONS

Access Now is proud to present the outcomes report for the ninth iteration of our annual summit series, RightsCon Online (rightscon.org), which took place across every time zone from Monday, July 27 to Friday, July 31, 2020.

Since 2011, we have convened the human rights and technology community in key hubs around the world, including Tunis, Toronto, Brussels, Rio de Janeiro, Manila, and San Francisco. At the end of RightsCon Tunis in 2019, we announced our intention to bring RightsCon to San José, Costa Rica. Instead, in 2020, for the first time in the history of the summit, we embarked on a journey to somewhere entirely different and unexpected – creating a fully online RightsCon experience.

In transitioning from an in-person convening to an online summit, this year's RightsCon established a critical platform for thousands of experts to connect, coordinate, and advance a shared agenda for 2020 and for the decade ahead. It also allowed us to broaden our reach and increase participation from 2,979 participants at RightsCon Tunis in 2019, to 7,681 in 2020, meaning that RightsCon Online was not only the largest, but the most accessible iteration of our summit to date.

RightsCon Online demonstrated the importance of coming together, and embodied the strength, resilience, and solidarity of our global community in a time of crisis. From the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter protests and the Hong Kong demonstrations, to internet shutdowns and civil society crackdowns around the world, the events of 2020 have reaffirmed that the movement for human rights requires all of us, together.

Participants by region

Africa — 7.5 %
Asia Pacific — 13.5 %
Europe — 24 %
Latin America & the Caribbean — 13 %
Middle East & North Africa — 4 %
North America — 33 %
Did not disclose — 5 %
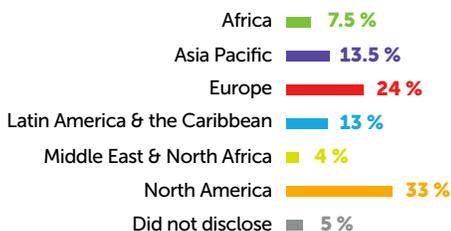
Participants by stakeholder

40.8%
13.7%
11.4%
6.4%
8.1%
4.5%
4.1%
3.8%
2.1%
0.4%
4.8%

40.8%
CIVIL SOCIETY

- Civil society
- Academic
- Private sector & start-ups
- International institution
- Other
- Government
- Philantropic sector
- Press & media
- Investor
- Did not disclose
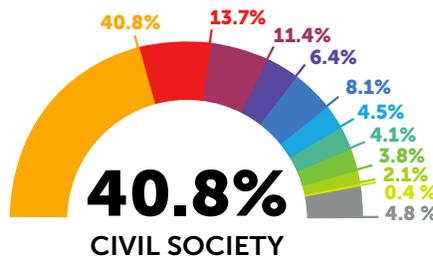
Participants by gender group

56 %
33.9 %
4.1 %
6 %

56%
IDENTIFYING AS WOMEN

- Women
- Men
- Non-binary
- Did not disclose
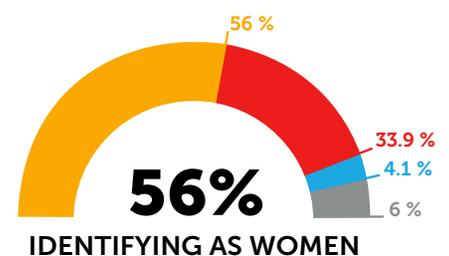
The RightsCon program

Every year, the RightsCon program is built by, and for, our community. Sessions are sourced from an open Call for Proposals, reviewed by the experts on our Program Committee, and curated based on urgent and emerging priorities for human rights in the digital age.

Maria Ressa,
CEO of Rappler

Shoshana Zuboff,
Academic and author

Rashad Robinson,
President of Color Of Change

For RightsCon Online, we built a custom platform, where participants could explore the program, engage in discussion forums, and connect through private messages and one-on-one calls. We also adapted our traditional session formats in order to advance the conversation in new ways. Live programming took the form of panels, fireside chats, community labs, and strategy sessions. Other content, including recorded lightning talks and tech demos, remained available throughout the summit for participants to engage with regardless of timezone or location.

Our commitment to session excellence shone throughout our 2020 iteration. Recognizing that online convening is uncharted territory for many in our community, we provided format-specific trainings to session organizers to prepare them to facilitate online discussions. We also refined our approach to Solve My Problem, a closed-door session format piloted at RightsCon Tunis, and hosted a number of fireside chats with leading voices in the technology and human rights space.

Program Overview:

10	309	14
PROGRAM TRACKS	SESSIONS	HIGH-LEVEL FIRESIDE CHATS
7	140	SESSIONS HELD IN
INTERSECTING THEMES	FACILITATORS TRAINED	ENGLISH • SPANISH • ARABIC

Intersecting themes

This year marked our most competitive [Call for Proposals](#) yet, with 1,338 proposals received from 110 countries. When we pivoted to an online summit, we made the decision to concentrate on the issues identified as the most pressing and relevant in our [RightsCon community survey](#), and deliver a program and a platform that would deepen collaboration in a moment when solidarity across sectors and borders is critically needed.

We took crucial steps to rethink the program structure, which involved refining our program tracks, and establishing a set of intersecting themes, such as gender justice and health, that cut across some or all of the tracks. The themes demonstrate the interconnected and converging nature of the technologies that shape our lives, and correspond to our commitment to create a navigable and effective journey for RightsCon participants.

Health

A nascent area of the program in Tunis, public health arose as a prominent intersecting theme in 2020. The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected almost every aspect of our lives, and exposed existing gaps in our social and political systems. From internet connectivity and election security, and the protection of patient data, to the role of the media and technology industries in stemming the spread of misinformation, the pandemic — and the global response to it — has challenged and expanded our understanding of health and healthcare in the context of digital development, privacy, and access to information.

"Transnationally and nationally, an uprising triggered by the murder of George Floyd has really forced a long-overdue interrogation of systemic racism...and the area of tech is one where this conversation is equally urgent." - E. Tendayi Achiume, U.N. Special Rapporteur on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance

Protest

As censorship and crackdowns threaten activists and frontline communities, human rights defenders, researchers, and technologists are pioneering alternative forms of resistance and resilience, aided by technology. The freedoms of assembly and association look vastly different in a socially-distant world, with digital strikes and campaigns dominating on Twitter and TikTok, Black Lives Matter protestors filming police brutality in Minneapolis and São Paulo, and labor organizers harnessing diverse media to unveil corporate surveillance and silencing efforts. Even with public health concerns around physical gathering, 2020 also marked a return to the roots of protest, with renewed appreciation for the visceral power of marches and demonstrations to push for radical action and change.

Digital identity

The [#WhyID coalition](#) formed at RightsCon Tunis in 2019, with the aim to halt the deployment of poorly designed, ineffective, or dangerous digital identity programs. In 2020, the concept of digital ID has come under increasing scrutiny, as sessions examined the gendered and exclusionary practices behind recently developed identity programs; privacy risks and ramifications in Asian and African contexts; the application of human rights-centered design; and strategic litigation and civil society advocacy tactics to influence implementation of such programs. Raising particular alarm is the adoption of digital welfare states, which link identity and distribution of social benefits, perpetuating poverty, poor health outcomes, and lack of political representation.

Environment

Last year, ahead of our planned summit in Costa Rica, we made a commitment to expand the conversation around environmental sustainability, and create space for our community to consider the impact of technology on our planet. The RightsCon Online program tapped into the momentum of the climate justice movement, with sessions on digital activism; innovation and sustainable futures; environmental monitoring tools; "green" internet governance; online surveillance and attacks on land defenders; benchmarking the footprint of the tech sector; and more.

OUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
Last year, alongside committing to expand the topic of environmental sustainability in our program, we also pledged to improve our overall sustainability efforts in organizing an in-person summit. In the lead up to Costa Rica, the RightsCon Team looked into ways of reducing and, eventually neutralizing, our carbon footprint and environmental impact. The shift to an online RightsCon resulted in an unexpected achievement of those goals, creating our greenest summit to date - however our efforts do not end there. We will carry forward our sustainability efforts, regardless of how future RightsCon summits look.

Indigenous rights

The rights of indigenous peoples forms an important and intentional throughline of the RightsCon program. Building on conversations hosted in Tunis and Toronto, sessions this year mapped indigenous perspectives on data protection; media literacy and education; linguistic diversity; and connectivity. Climate justice and protection of land defenders also informed the discussion on indigenous sovereignty and data science, due to the introduction of environmental sustainability as a new area of exploration.

COVID-19 has heightened concerns about information flow and internet access in indigenous communities. In her fireside chat, Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) specifically drew attention to the digital divide and the widening "homework gap" affecting students on tribal land in the United States.

"It's not just that indigenous people need the internet. I truly believe that the internet needs indigenous people."
- Darrah Blackwater, indigenous spectrum rights advocate, Navajo Nation

Gender justice

Gender equity and LGBTQ+ rights remain a prominent theme in the RightsCon program, both in terms of content and representation. RightsCon Online continued our strong track record in elevating the perspectives of gender-diverse people as session organizers, with 62.3% identifying as women, and 2.7% identifying as nonbinary or genderqueer. Sessions explored the interplay of gender and technology, drawing on intersectional approaches to AI and internet research; advancing justice for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; and reflecting on successes of feminist and LGBTQ+ movements in creating vibrant and secure digital spaces.

Futurism

The devastating consequences of multiple crises – the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and rising political, social, and economic inequities – have transformed our vision of the future. Systemic disruption, driven by activists, technology providers, policymakers, journalists, and other rights-bearers, requires imagination and persistence. In a year, a decade, or a century from now, what actions can we take to achieve digital justice? RightsCon Online sought out the answers to that question, with futures-focused sessions charting a course for democracy, sustainability, business innovation, and civil society resilience.

Program tracks

RightsCon Online featured ten program tracks which, together with the intersecting themes, enabled participants to explore a full range of human rights and technology issues, from artificial intelligence and content governance, to cybersecurity and surveillance, and beyond.

TOP TRACKS AT RIGHTSCON ONLINE:

Check out which topics received the most engagement this year below.

Civil society resistance and resilience	Internet access and shutdowns	Content governance and censorship	Privacy and surveillance	Data protection and user control
3468 ENGAGEMENTS ACROSS **50** SESSIONS	**3325** ENGAGEMENTS ACROSS **34** SESSIONS	**3105** ENGAGEMENTS ACROSS **50** SESSIONS	**3093** ENGAGEMENTS ACROSS **31** SESSIONS	**2246** ENGAGEMENTS ACROSS **32** SESSIONS
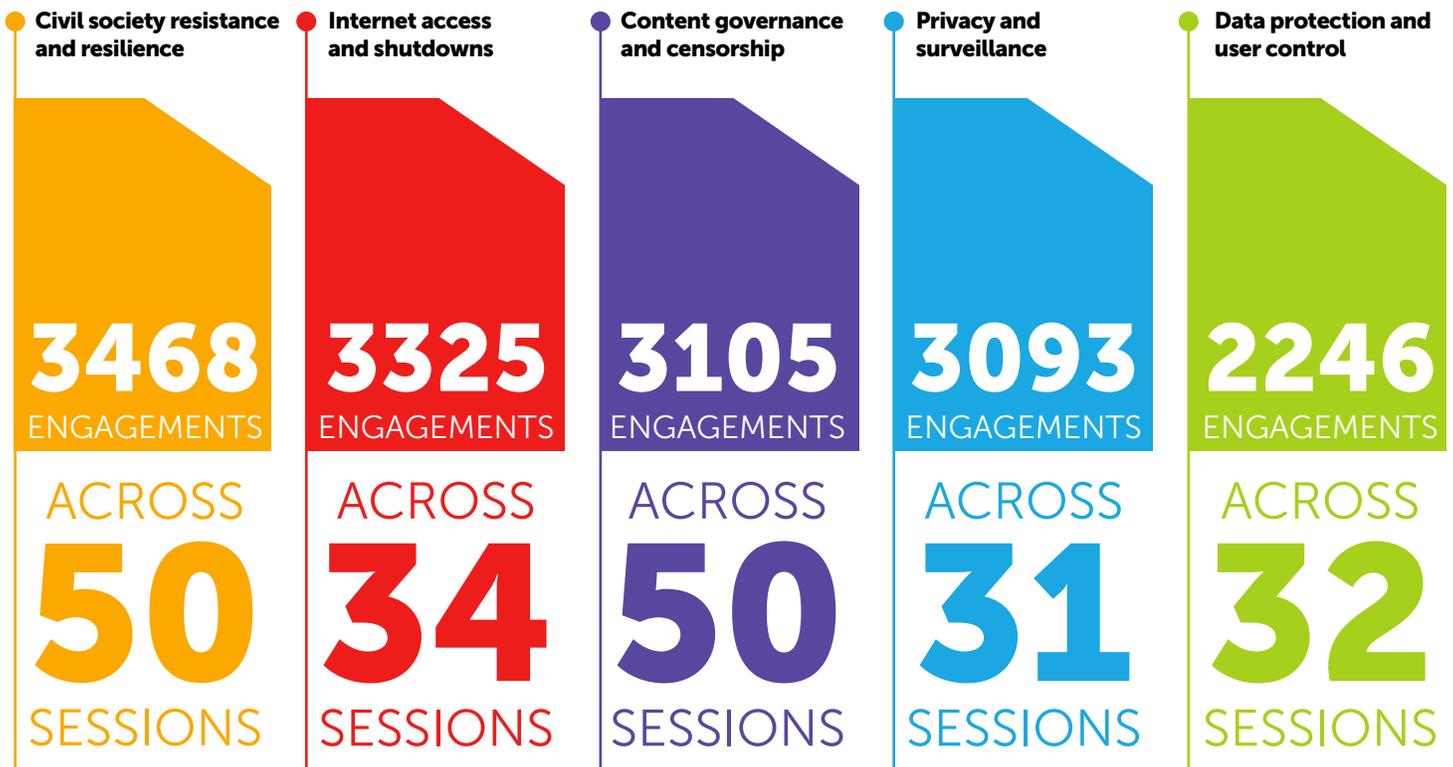
AI, automation, and the algorithm

Artificial intelligence (AI) has shaped the technologies that underpin our societies, economies, and political systems. The conversation at RightsCon couches algorithmic governance in human rights principles, while delving into the biases and business interests that corrupt automated processes and enhance threats to our privacy and security.

Unseating white, patriarchal, and Global North perspectives, sessions placed an emphasis on localization, intersectional feminism, community-driven design, and regulatory frameworks developed in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Discussions and workshops offered creative tools for advocacy and resistance to AI-assisted surveillance, and critiqued automated content delivery systems which undermine freedom of expression online.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- Data Dada: creative strategies for algorithmic resistance! (Icarus Salon)
- Mujerxs unidas, jamás serán vencidas: intersectional feminism in the age of AI (Coding Rights)
- Tackling online abuse: bridging the gap between human rights and computer science (Workshop on Online Abuse and Harms)
- ¿Ambiente artificial o inteligencia ambiental? (IPANDETEC Centroamérica)

Civil society resistance and resilience

Anti-rights actors and authorities are seizing upon the COVID-19 climate to renew or expand threats to civil society, cutting off access to information, resources, and international support. This program track – first created at RightsCon Brussels in 2017 and reintroduced in 2020 – examined the current state of civil society, connecting and mapping trends related to community-building, online activism, self-care for individuals and organizations, philanthropy and funding models, and more.

Notably, sessions presented cross-movement strategies to dismantle tools of oppression, such as crackdowns and censorship, with perspectives from environmental defenders, racial justice organizers, diaspora communities, and activists across every region of the world.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- Social movements: amplifying resilience and opportunities for support and solidarity from the international community (CIVICUS; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

- Civil society in the digital age in Africa: identifying threats and mounting pushbacks (Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria)

- A world in revolution: lessons and tactics from 2019 protests (Social Media Exchange (SMEX); Open Technology Fund)

- Seize the signatures: digital activism is rewriting the rules of mobilization in times of climate crisis (Change.org; Extinction Rebellion)

Content governance and censorship

The regulation and moderation of information in digital spaces is one of the defining issues of the decade for the RightsCon community. Content creation and dissemination across networks and platforms implicates a range of stakeholders, and in the midst of a global health crisis, it is increasingly difficult to deny the dire impacts of disinformation and online hate on our human rights.

As moderation practices and principles evolve, the notion of a "one size fits all" model of platform accountability has receded in favor of localized, context-specific systems of content governance. RightsCon programming delved into urgent freedom of expression issues, such as transparency and oversight of content removals; responses to hate speech and harassment; strategies for online documentation and record-keeping; and efforts to combat health, climate, and political disinformation. Digital media literacy, data journalism, and fact-checking were some of the evolving tactics surfaced at the disposal of researchers, journalists, private sector leaders, and advocates who are invested in creating safer, more sustainable online ecosystems.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- When misinformation hurts our fundamental health rights (Meedan)

- Social media platforms: are they art's new gatekeepers? (PEN America)

- From Fortnite to Hong Kong: video game policy and human rights (Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF); Access Now; Center for Technology and Society; Geekylegal)

- Christchurch Call: a framework for collective action, in consultation with civil society (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

Cyber norms and practice

The intersecting role of cybersecurity for individuals, companies, and states often places the right to privacy at odds with national and corporate interests. Strong regulations, data protection principles, and encryption tools are key to securing digital spaces and safeguarding users from cyber attacks. Sessions ranged in focus, from honing in on individual digital security practices for artists to undertaking big-picture questions on governance and the applicability of international law in a militarized cyberspace.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- UNdoing progress and rights with a new global cybercrime treaty? (Third Way)
- Not "revenge porn": new trends in non-consensual intimate imagery in Uganda and the role of digital security (Women of Uganda Network)
- Encryption under fire: a discussion on the threats to private messaging around the world (WhatsApp)
- Militarized cyber space: intelligence, espionage, and the application of international law (Centre for Multilateral Affairs; Association for Progressive Communications (APC))

Data protection and user control

Day to day, routine technologies collect thousands of points of data on our habits, preferences, and interests. The construction of data-driven economies around these technologies not only endangers our right to privacy, but also empowers political agents, advertisers, and hackers to exploit our data for commercial or other gain.

While technology companies and providers enabled these markets to flourish, often without the consent of users, sessions detailed how strong laws and policies can prevent these abuses and demand greater transparency into the collection, storage, management, and usage of data. To break apart data monopolies, policymakers and independent authorities should implement robust regulatory frameworks, and enforce principles of design and consent that serve human rights, rather than corporate interests.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- Ownership or rights: what's the path to achieving true agency over data? (Ada Lovelace Institute)
- From toys to schools to digital IDs: pushing for better governance and accountability for children's data (UNICEF)
- Strengthening indigenous data governance and sovereignty: lessons learned from mobile data collection apps (East West Management Institute's Open Development Initiative)
- From devices to bodies: a tale on DNA data collection (Coding Rights)

Mariana Valente
Director, InternetLab

Will Cathcart
Head of WhatsApp

"There's a saying that 'anything that was around when we are born is human nature, and anything that's introduced after we're born is technology.' In that sense, in Taiwan, democracy is very much a technology." - Audrey Tang, Digital Minister, Taiwan

Democracy, elections, and political change

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the tenuous position of democracies around the world. Deepening inequalities, combined with sharp political polarization, has widened the gulf between those who reap benefits from systemic power structures, and those who do not. Election security, an emerging issue for observers and independent monitoring bodies, has taken on critical importance as votes are cast in the midst of interference, censorship, and corruption. In many countries, democracy itself is on the ballot.

Dissatisfaction with government inaction to the pandemic and connected crises has triggered protests and demonstrations. From Hong Kong to Beirut, Portland to Minsk, millions of people are taking to the streets and social media to voice political grievances. Sustained activism continues to lead to important and hard-won victories for human rights, such as Microsoft's ban on police use of facial recognition technology and Sidewalk Labs' decision to abandon the Quayside project in Toronto. Movement leaders are capitalizing on the momentum to build more equitable policies and practices at the local, regional, and global level.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- Securing elections during COVID-19: online threats, vulnerabilities, and resources to protect the foundations of democracy (Cloudflare)

- From passive participation to productive resistance: building community capacity to challenge smart city tech (Open North)

- Dissecting the (not so) democratic drama: reflecting on the digital manipulations and political persecutions in the Tunisian 2019 elections (Bloggeurs sans Chaines)

- Unrecognized and digitally disenfranchised: digital rights for peoples without a state (SecDev Group)

Internet access and shutdowns

Connecting the unconnected, and ensuring access to a free, fair, and open internet, remains an urgent and multifaceted challenge. Poor infrastructure, prohibitive costs, and other barriers place remote and at risk communities at a severe disadvantage, compounding structural injustices. Even when these barriers are removed, disruption in the form of internet shutdowns, throttling, and other forms of network interference can have profound consequences on the health, lives, and livelihoods of those who are affected.

As COVID-19 pushes more public services, such as education and healthcare, online, governments and internet service providers have an obligation to close the digital divide and invest in connectivity initiatives that center underrepresented groups, such as indigenous communities, refugees, and people experiencing poverty. Further, civil society should continue to learn from and champion Global South-led efforts to localize and decolonize the internet.

RightsCon Online sessions emphasized collaboration across disciplines in order to establish clear standards for universal connectivity; expand on the "soft factors" that limit access; measure the impact of shutdowns, which are often used to quell social unrest or cut off the flow of information during elections and key political moments; and develop alternative tools and technologies that support digital inclusion.

"The internet ceases to be a luxury, and becomes a foundation — a foundation of our education systems, a foundation of our health systems, a foundation of our economies. And what that means for those who are not connected are that they are left further behind, and the digital divide has a massive exacerbating effect on all other inequalities." - Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the U.N. 75th Anniversary

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- Global connectivity: where are we heading after COVID-19? (Alliance for Affordable Internet)

- Challenges for linguistic minorities on the internet (Centro ISUR; Fundación Karisma)

- Building rainbow bridges: what LGBTI communities can teach us about overcoming the digital divide (ILGA World - The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association)

- Investigating internet shutdowns with open data (Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI); Center for Applied Internet Data Analysis (CAIDA))

"We have to come before data, and this begins with a new charter of fundamental rights that asks, "Who gets to know about my experience?" - Shoshana Zuboff, academic and author of The Age of Surveillance Capitalism

New models for business and labor

In the last decade, economic systems have grown increasingly receptive to business models that prioritize surveillance, and the collection and monetization of user data. Accountability measures, such as transparency reporting, oversight mechanisms, and impact assessments, place pressure on companies to prioritize the security and privacy of users over profits.

RightsCon frequently connects industry representatives from major companies, such as Microsoft, Facebook, and Cisco, with activists, journalists, and frontline defenders whose experiences are shaped by digital products and services. In 2020, the program not only delved into long-standing topics, including privacy by design, data protection, and human rights due diligence, but also carved out space to discuss structural problems within the tech sector and the platform economy. Labor rights and sustainability came to the fore in these sessions, underscoring that change must start at the systems level in order to disrupt the far-reaching effects of corporate surveillance and control.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- Going coop: a platform model for workers in the South (International Labor Organization (ILO); IT for Change)

- Investing in our shared humanity: connecting investors and human rights defenders (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC); Investor Alliance for Human Rights; International Service for Human Rights (ISHR))

- Is the tech greener on the other side? Benchmarking tech companies' environmental sustainability (Ranking Digital Rights)

- Building power over Amazon's empire (Athena; The Partnership for Working Families; Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR); MediaJustice; United for Respect)

Peace, justice, and investigations

What does peace and peacebuilding look like in the digital age? Conflict, war, and violence have accelerated the displacement of people. In this context, technology is heralded as both a tool for peace and an exacerbator of conflict.

Digital tools have enabled advocates and international bodies to document abuses against persecuted communities, such as Rohingya and Uyghurs; unearth mass graves and other evidence of atrocities; expose inhumane conditions in detainment and detention facilities; and collect data in humanitarian crises that can inform relief and response efforts. Yet online platforms have also contributed to radicalization and the incitement of violence, enabling bad actors to spread hate speech and governments to target individuals and communities with greater precision.

RightsCon Online hosted nuanced conversations on the intersection of justice and technology, featuring prominent speakers, such as activist Behrouz Boochani, U.N. Special Rapporteur on counterterrorism Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, and skilled practitioners from humanitarian and legal institutions.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- Behrouz Boochani: writing No Friend But the Mountains from Manus prison on WhatsApp (ARTICLE 19; Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University)

- Frequent flyer numbers, meal preferences, and the efficient countering of terrorist travel (U.N. Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism; Human Rights Center, University of Minnesota)

- The impending age of killer robots? How our data fuels autonomous weapons, and why it's not too late to stop them (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots)

- Unlocking the truth: documenting political prisoners globally (United for Iran)

Privacy and surveillance

As technology advances, so too do threats to our privacy. Biometric authentication, facial recognition, Bluetooth location trackers, voice-activated smart devices, and other "ambient" forms of surveillance are deeply embedded in our online and offline interactions, unleashing a Pandora's box of privacy issues. Predictably, the sale of products such as NSO Group's Pegasus and Amazon Ring to governments and authorities with poor human rights records has heightened security risks for activists, journalists, and dissidents. The potential for abuse or misuse of these increasingly sophisticated technologies is of chief concern for privacy experts, and extensive regulation, strategic litigation, and multi-stakeholder commitments are needed to rein in and draw clear boundaries around surveillance infrastructure.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

- All watched over by machines of loving grace: facial recognition, 1 CCTV camera for every 8 people, and protecting rights (Microsoft)

- Mass surveillance in China (and beyond): is dystopia already here? (Human Rights Watch)

- The dark side of digital ID: exclusion and the human rights of the poor (Digital Welfare State and Human Rights Project; Open Society Foundations (OSF))

- What is the price of inclusion for gender minorities? Privacy and surveillance challenges faced by transgender persons with digital identities (Independent)

Solve my problem

Solve My Problem sessions are closed-door conversations that invite representatives with diverse perspectives and issue area expertise to resolve a specific and defined problem at the intersection of human rights and technology.

First piloted at RightsCon Tunis in 2019, the format shifted from a focused, "in the room" experience into a facilitated online discussion. Solve My Problem sessions at RightsCon Online were divided into two time blocks, scheduled across one or more days of the summit. Read on for an overview of the problems and outcomes of the three sessions hosted this year.

On facial recognition technology

The problem statement:

As companies such as Microsoft and IBM adopt moratoriums or bans on facial recognition technologies (FRT), civil society should seek to clarify these commitments and build on the momentum to restrict or regulate the use of facial recognition globally.
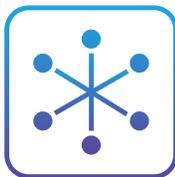
The structure:

The first block focused on civil society responses and objectives, and the second discussed multistakeholder strategies with companies, governments, and academics.

The outcomes:

1. Civil society participants determined a set of shared priorities to prevent human rights abuses, including robust transparency measures regarding the procurement and deployment of FRT, and recognition that even so-called "lower risk" applications contribute to building surveillance infrastructures.

2. Participants expressed doubt that safeguards could fully mitigate the damages inflicted by FRT, and discussed whether moratoriums are sufficient, as compared to bans.

3. The session mapped clear distinctions in regional approaches to regulating this technology. Organizations that are based in Europe or work closely with international institutions tend to focus on influencing national and global policies, while organizations based in the Global South are heavily engaged in litigation and limiting local authorities.

What's next?:

The session organizers are forming a permanent, broader coalition of civil society organizations to work on the human rights implications of FRT. The coalition, which will include racial justice advocates and other underrepresented groups, is in the initial stages of development.

On content moderation

The problem statement:

Online platforms, due to their market dominance and impact on public discourse, often operate with little or no oversight when it comes to the moderation, regulation, and removal of user-generated content. Strong models of oversight are needed to prevent gatekeeping, censorship, and other abuses of power.
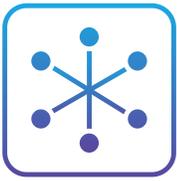
The structure:

During the first block, participants mapped out and critiqued existing oversight models, and discussed gaps in implementation in various national jurisdictions. The second block focused on regional aspects of oversight, from competences and limits on overreach in future models, to the right of standing granted to online users.

The outcomes:

1. Participants worked from the assumption that no one universal solution for oversight exists, and that regional context will dictate the efficacy and suitability of a given model.

2. Conversations about oversight mechanisms often center on the speed of removal and response, and the "consistency" of content legality assessment. These are issues of content, not of the processes created and adopted by online platforms. Governments, civil society organizations, and companies should frame the conversation around the latter.

3. Participants identified the need for a set of universal standards of oversight, approved by civil society and grounded in international human rights law.

What's next?:

The session organizers will host a blog post series, which will analyze the regional consequences of the Facebook Oversight Board in different parts of the world, and invite guest authors to contribute.

On environmental defenders

The problem statement:

Despite mounting threats to land and environmental defenders, there is a scarcity and lack of unification of data on online and offline attacks. The Defend the Defenders (DD) Coalition, which is composed of 50 national and international organizations, networks, and activists, has set out to create a global, collective database of these attacks.
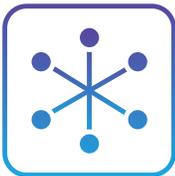
The structure:

Both session blocks convened experts from the data science, digital security, and human rights fields to discuss the technical challenges and solutions for consolidating, storing, and protecting data from diverse sources.

The outcomes:

1. Participants established that, in order to harmonize different databases, the most practical solution is an offline and online CSV template, which contributors can populate and upload/download.

2. The session generated creative strategies for data protection, such compartmentalizing the data-storage-visualization flow, while keeping sensitive data collection to a minimum.

3. Participants noted that the DD Coalition should create a robust and clear informed consent policy before the database is developed. Deliberate reflection around use cases will also help the project implementers make appropriate decisions about methodological, technical, and design aspects of the database.

What's next?:

The DD Coalition plans to launch the database in January 2021. You can find more information on their website.

Community highlights:

Amy Studdart
Senior Advisor, International
Republican Institute

Audrey Tang
Digital Minister, Taiwan

Nanjala Nyabola
Writer, Researcher, Political Analyst

"Access is really important, but access cannot be used as a substitute for being intentional about the platforms that we build and the spaces that we create on the internet." - Nanjala Nyabola, author and political analyst

The RightsCon community

Immediately after we postponed RightsCon Costa Rica, Access Now began strategizing around the question: how do we move a dynamic and high-energy summit of hundreds of sessions and thousands of participants online? While these were challenging questions, we knew finding alternative avenues to connect our work and collectively organize was more important than ever.

To guide us in our approach, we put a call out to our network, asking for their support in shaping what an online RightsCon would look like. The response was inspiring: the majority of our community emphasized the need for a platform to strategize, connect, and move forward their work collectively – particularly during this moment. We received over 700 responses from 100 countries across 10 sectors, with 90% of respondents indicating that they were either likely or very likely to participate in a virtual version of our summit. We checked in with our session proposers and their responses were also very telling: 70% of those who replied to the survey said that hosting a session remained a priority for them and their work.

We knew RightsCon Online would be different, but we were blown away by the strength, resilience, and solidarity of our global community in a time of crisis. Together, we demonstrated the power of convening and experienced an unparalleled opportunity to expand representation in this environment.

> **Marianne Díaz Hernández** ✔
> @mariannedh
>
> Estoy despierta desde las 4 am trabajando, tengo una sesión a las 7 am y me acosté a la 1 am. ¿Se puede tener jetlag de #rightscon online?
>
> 5:59 AM · Jul 28, 2020
>
> ♡ 2   👤 See Marianne Díaz Hernández's other Tweets

Translation: **I have been up since 4am working, I have a session at 7am and I go to bed at 1am. Can you have jetlag from #Rightscon Online?**

With the community continuing to grow every year, we were thrilled to see RightsCon Online welcome 5,754 first-time participants for a total of 7,681 participants tuning in from 157 countries and presenting an astounding 175% overall participation increase from RightsCon Tunis. As always, upholding diversity and representation continued to be our highest priority. The majority of participants (56%) self-identified as women with 4.1% identifying as non-binar or third gender (inclusive of bigender, agender, genderfluid, and gender non-conforming).

Taking a closer look at the regional participation breakdown, the majority of participants came from North America and Europe with 32.9% and 24.1% respectively. Compared to RightsCon Tunis, Asia Pacific saw an increase of participation from 6% to 13.5%. Similarly, Latin America and the Caribbean's representation increased from 5% to 13%. Finally, representation from Africa was 7.5%, and 4% from the Middle East and North Africa.

Consistent with previous years, civil society comprised the majority of stakeholder representation with 40.8%. In comparison to RightsCon Tunis, government and international institution participation increased slightly from 9% to 10.9% There was a slight decrease of private sector representation from 14% to 11.4%, but an increase in philanthropic sector representation from 1% to 4%. This year, we provided additional options for stakeholders within the community to select, including creatives (2.1%) and investors (0.4%).

Inclusivity at RightsCon Online

This year, for the first time ever, RightsCon was entirely free of charge. Our approach to registration came from a commitment to provide a platform that would ensure the broadest participation possible. While we typically exercise a flexible ticket discount policy – in 2019, we gave away over 2,000 free tickets – we recognized that in light of the challenges and financial uncertainty that many in our community have faced in 2020, waiving registration fees was especially important.

In thinking about accessibility, it was clear that although virtual convening alleviates the barriers for international travel, those without quality internet access would be hindered from meaningful participation. Consequently, we introduced, for the first time, our Connectivity Fund, aimed at providing direct financial support to session organizers, speakers, and civil society participants who needed support in the form of additional bandwidth or increased connectivity in order to effectively participate during RightsCon Online. Funding was provided to 74 recipients from 21 different countries. The majority of applications came from Africa, receiving 81.1% of the funding.

How we approached safety and security

Whether in person or online, our priority for safety and security remained the same: maintaining a safe, productive, and inclusive space throughout the summit. Given that we were navigating a new environment, we recognized that we had to take extra considerations and adapt our security and response processes. Working with our partners at TechChange, we built a secure and tailored platform and conducted a full security audit. In anticipation of any incidents, we built a strong reporting, escalation, and response system. To help prepare participants, we laid out clear communications and guides, including digital hygiene and digital security best practices. Members of our staff underwent Code of Conduct and moderator training, which was pivotal in ensuring the successful delivery of each session.

Launches, outcomes, and achievements

United Nations experts raise the alarm for digital spaces during COVID-19

Six U.N. Special Rapporteurs released an official statement at RightsCon, warning of closing of digital spaces amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and embracing their commitment to continue documenting the intersection of technology within their mandates. Signatories included:

• David Kaye (freedom of opinion and expression)
• Mary Lawlor (situation of human rights defenders);
• Clément Voule (freedom of peaceful assembly and association);
• Agnès Callamard (extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions)
• E. Tendayi Achiume (contemporary forms of racism)
• Fionnuala D. Ní Aoláin (protection of human rights while countering terrorism)

The rapporteurs emphasized that "with the closing of civic space and restrictions on offline media, access to universal, open, affordable, secure, and stable Internet is vital to save lives." The joint statement builds on a similar statement from our 2019 summit, which called on governments to ensure that human rights are respected and protected in the digital sphere.

Brazil's harmful "fake news" bill addressed

Access Now and the CoalizãoDireitos na Rede organized a private meeting and a public panel to discuss the PL 2630/20, also known as the "Fake News Bill", in Brazil. They called on representatives from Brazil's Congress to address the harmful bill, leading to direct commitments to improve and modify provisions of mass traceability and user identification.

The bill included terrible provisions on user identification and traceability that eliminated online anonymity and allowed mass surveillance of messages, even encrypted ones. The private high-level meeting was attended by Brazilian parliamentarians, international and national civil society organizations, the OAS rapporteur for freedom of expression and the U.N. right to privacy rapporteur.

Moreover, Access Now and the CoalizãoDireitos na Rede organized a public panel to share the positive

and negative aspects of the bill and announced a campaign to the international community that attended RightsCon Online. During the panel, one of the bill's authors deputy Felipe Rigoni, who was participating as a speaker, shared he was working toward the removal of the dangerous provisions on user identification and traceability. This declaration was an important signal that the criticism made by civil society groups and other stakeholders were heard and accepted by decision makers.

[SESSION SPOTLIGHT]

FIRESIDE CHAT
David Kaye, former U.N. Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression

On the final day of his mandate, David Kaye joined Maria Ressa, journalist and CEO of Rappler, for a wide-ranging discussion on the evolution of freedom of expression online during his tenure as rapporteur from 2014 to 2020. He spoke extensively on the topic of technology-facilitated violence and harassment, citing the continued trolling and targeting of Ressa in the Philippines, and emphasized the rapporteur's role in holding both companies and states to account for failing to mitigate this form of abuse.

Second Oxford Statement calls for protecting COVID-19 vaccine research from malicious cyber operations

Complementing a public session at RightsCon, the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law, and Armed Conflict (ELAC) at Oxford University organized a workshop with Microsoft and the Government of Japan, focused on safeguarding COVID-19 vaccine research and trial data from cyber attacks and intrusions. Based on these discussions, ELAC released the Second Oxford Statement on International Law, an open letter affirming state obligations to secure vaccine research, which garnered support from 50 lawyers, academics, and policymakers.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rebukes U.S. President's Executive Order to leverage Section 230

FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel delivered a statement in response to the Trump administration's efforts to direct the FCC to moderate online speech under the auspices of Section 230. The Commissioner firmly condemned such broad overreach of government power, and released her statement at RightsCon on the same day that the Secretary of Commerce filed a petition to begin implementation of the Executive Order.

"In the United States we are a democratic, open society in which people can hold their government accountable, even if imperfectly. Whether we can keep it that way depends on the survival of a robust, independent digital space for activism and public discourse." - Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission

Freemuse launches the Know Artistic Rights campaign

Freemuse announced its "Know Your Artistic Rights" campaign and digital toolkit to protect artists from harassment online. The session brought together human rights advocates and creators, such as film director Wanuri Kahui (Rafiki) and product designer Arda Awais (Identity 2.0), to discuss violations of artistic expression on digital platforms, and explore how artists can stay safe online.

U.N. B-Tech project releases report on rights-based models for technology companies

B-Tech, an initiative under the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), launched a new foundational paper, Addressing Business Model Related Human Rights Risks, at RightsCon Online. The report details the role of companies, investors, and governments in ensuring that business practices and evaluations across the technology industry are aligned with human rights principles.

Hiperderecho launches Son Mis Datos report

Peruvian civil society organization, Hiperderecho presented Son Mis Datos (It's My Data), which details the state of data protection in Peru, and explains how to request, retrieve, and authenticate personal data from private companies. The report builds on the Son Mis Datos web application project, which simplifies the process of conducting citizen audits of corporate data use.

Launch of AI Myths project by Mozilla fellow Daniel Leufer

AI Myths, a project to tackle eight of the most common and harmful myths, misconceptions, and inaccuracies about artificial intelligence, led by Access Now Mozilla Fellow Daniel Leufer, was launched at RightsCon Online. AI Myths uses research, analysis, interactive experiences, and resource lists to provide readers with a clear-eyed view of what AI can — and cannot — really do.

Other notable RightsCon Online 2020 outcomes

- A new Digital Trade Alliance was announced with the World Trade Organization during RightsCon session *Trading away our digital rights: the digital trade agenda at the World Trade Organization.*

- Minister Audrey Tang of Taiwan signed on in support of Access Now's #WhyID letter.

- Expansion in membership, particularly from South Asia, for the Digital Rights Litigators Network.

- The Canadian government announced a $2 million CAD investment in online safety for human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society groups.

Testimonials

"Ended the Democracy 2030 panel to a message on Twitter saying that the panel was "life giving". I feel the same - I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the chance to think optimistically and constructively about the future we want to build. Excited to work with you all to build it!" **— Amy Studdart,** IRI

"This was my first RightsCon conference and what an experience it was, hosting a conversation about healing, hope and protest was just what I needed during a summer during which Black people were grappling with mass deaths through COVID and evidence that we are still continually hunted and killed by the police. I did not know how the audience would respond to witnessing two Black people engaging in "kitchen talk" on the main stage but they embraced us. I hope this will be the beginning of a long relationship with RightsCon as they think about how anti-racist policies and practices can become part of human rights frames." **— Mutale Nkonde**, CEO AI for the People, Key Constituent of the UN 3C Round Table on AI

"I had a B Plan for RightsCon when I heard it was going to be in Costa Rica. I had expected visa issues and so made plans for remote participation. And Baaam!! When we went fully virtual, I had apprehensions because I was hosting a very high-level panel. But everything went okay. I do recall that UNESCO panel where someone had to speak in French. We did not have official translation. I, and one other person instinctively started transcribing the French speaker into English. It was automatic, it was voluntary. At that time, I knew there was "RightsCon Spirit". I loved that all global time zones could have a chunk, their own chunk. I loved that I could be in one session and also follow the tweets from other sessions. I loved the gender balance of sessions. I loved the passion of the young volunteers. And yes, I loved that the RightsCon ladies rocked it." **- Nnenna Nwakwanma,** Chief Web Advocate, World Wide Web Foundation

"I'm glad for having decided to attend the #RightsCon2020. It is a great experience for me and I am learning a lot. Thank you and the entire team at #RightsCon and #AccessNow for a job well done and for facilitating my internet costs for the week's attendance." **- Laure Nganlay,** Communication Associate #defyhatenow Cameroon

"There was a huge contingent interested in the right to health, with topics directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to other public health and digital rights intersections. As a public health researcher, it was so great to have the chance to learn from folks in other disciplines, with ideas and insights we could bring back to our own pandemic and health misinformation response effort, in this crazy, totally (what feels like an) unprecedented time."   **— Nat Gyenes,** Meedan

"Nothing is inevitable. That's the message for all of us in this next decade." - Shoshana Zuboff, academic and author of The Age of Surveillance Capitalism

Looking ahead to 2021

Engaging the Latin American and Caribbean region

Our in-person summit in 2020 was slated to take place in Costa Rica, bringing the conference to Central America for the first time, and returning to Latin America and the Caribbean after RightsCon Rio de Janeiro in 2012. When we pivoted to an online summit, we wanted to ensure regional perspectives would remain central and relevant to the overall programming of RightsCon Online. To achieve this, we consulted with partners and organizations in the region to better understand what issues, projects, and initiatives should be centered in the summit. In the end, we hosted 29 sessions in Spanish and 21 sessions specifically focusing on the Latin America and Caribbean region.

Antonia Urrejola Noguera,
IACHR Rapporteur on the
Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Alexis Ohanian,
Co-founder of Reddit

Audrey Tang,
Digital Minister of Taiwan

Dr. Paola Vega Castillo,
Minister of Science, Technology, and
Telecommunications, Costa Rica

Rashida Richardson,
Director of Policy Research, AI Now
Institute; Visiting Scholar, Rutgers Law

RightsCon in 2021 and beyond

The unparalleled global events of this year have made our world an unpredictable place, however, one thing remains clear: there is still work to be done. From protecting free speech to advancing racial justice and addressing the climate crisis, our collective efforts are needed to create solutions for some of the most pressing and challenging issues of our time.

It is our deep commitment to preserve spaces for convening and bring the RightsCon community together in 2021. Our planning for next year is underway and we're taking the learnings from bringing RightsCon Online to life as we shape our next summit. We'll soon share important updates — including a formal Save the Date — and details on how you can join us for next year, the 10th anniversary of RightsCon.

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Access Now defends and extends the digital rights of users at risk around the world. By combining direct technical support, comprehensive policy engagement, global advocacy, grassroots grantmaking, and convenings such as RightsCon, we fight for human rights in the digital age.

CONTACT

For more information about RightsCon contact Nikki Gladstone, RightsCon Director, at nikki@accessnow.org

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