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RightsCon
Tunis 2019

OUTCOMES REPORT

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- The RightsCon Tunis opening ceremony
- Speech by writer and political analyst Nanjala Nyabola at the opening ceremony
- Researcher & activist Dr. Usha Ramanathan receiving Access Now's Human Rights Heroes Award from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet
- Access Now presenting this year's Human Rights Heroes
- Participants problem solve during a session hosted in strategy ally
- The official RightsCon Party presented by Access Now
- UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions Agnès Callamard speaking at one of the Landmark sessions
- Writer, professor, and techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci at the closing ceremony

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Celebrating RightsCon Tunis

2,797 PARTICIPANTS

122 COUNTRIES

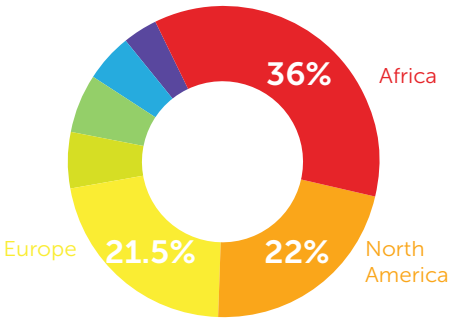
450+ SESSIONS

Access Now is proud to present the outcomes report for the eighth iteration of our annual summit series, RightsCon Tunis (rightscon.org), which took place from June 11 to 14, 2019.

Since 2011, we have brought together the global human rights and technology community in key hubs around the world, including San Francisco, Manila, Rio de Janeiro, Brussels, and Toronto. This year, for the first time in the history of the summit, we gathered in the Africa and Middle East region, in Tunis, Tunisia.

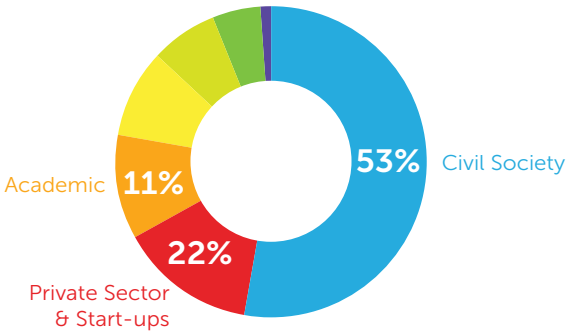
At a time when the need for the global community to connect, strategize, and plan for a better future has never been greater, Tunisia – an emerging tech tub and new democracy – stands as a beacon of hope for countries in the region and around the world.

RightsCon in Tunis provided a platform where participants could come together, showcase, and move forward their work on human rights in the digital age.



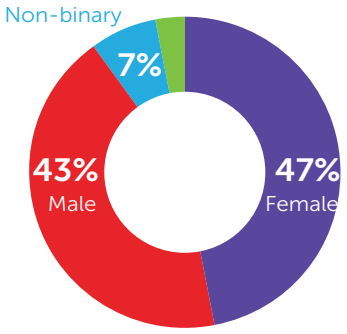
Participants by region

Africa	36%
North America	22%
Europe	21.5%
Middle East	6%
Asia Pacific	6%
Latin America	5%
Did not disclose	3.5%



Participants by stakeholder

Civil Society	53%
Private Sector & Start-ups	14%
Academic	11%
Government & Intergovernmental Organizations	9%
Press and Media	7%
Independent	5%
Philanthropic Organizations	1%



Participants by gender group

Female	47%
Male	43%
Non-binary	7%
Did not disclose	3%

The RightsCon program

To reflect the current issues at the intersection of human rights and technology around the world, the RightsCon program is community sourced, powered by proposals from participants. Sessions take on multiple formats, including workshops, strategic roundtables, panels, fireside chats, lightning talks, tech demos, and more.

In an effort to continue building a solutions-oriented space, we piloted new formats at RightsCon Tunis, including Solve My Problem, closed-door space for strategic problem-solving, and Landmark sessions, elevated discussions around specific, trending issues. Learn more about the Solve My Problem and Landmark sessions piloted at RightsCon Tunis throughout this report.

Program Overview:

17
PROGRAM TRACKS

450+
SESSIONS

SESSIONS HELD IN
FRENCH • ENGLISH • ARABIC

23
SESSION EXCELLENCE TRAININGS

283
TRAINED MODERATORS

WITH THREE NEW FORMATS
MEETUP, LANDMARK, & SOLVE MY PROBLEM

Program trends

During the RightsCon program review process, a number of trends emerged across the summit's tracks, showcasing the increasing interconnectivity of the issue areas explored at RightsCon, as well as the complexity of the human rights and technology space.

Content moderation

Can online content be moderated while still respecting and protecting freedom of expression? One of the most pressing questions on this year's program, RightsCon Tunis invited diverse stakeholders to determine practical options for content moderation that both protect the most vulnerable communities and are compatible with human rights standards and principles.

Digital ID

Digital ID programs are becoming increasingly commonplace and while these systems promote certain benefits, there is insufficient focus on the potential consequences of the technology. Sessions at RightsCon Tunis placed an emphasis on privacy by design and rights-based approaches to digital ID systems, with particular attention given to data collection and automated decision-making for those most at risk, such as refugees.

[LANDMARK SESSION]
Tracked – pitfalls and promises of digital identification systems

From financial inclusion and migrant identification, to border security and state surveillance, digital identity constitutes a new, and potentially dangerous, tool to systematize and track individuals and groups. This Landmark examined the impact of this emerging technology on communities at risk, and emphasized the lived experiences of those who are targeted by digital ID systems, particularly in the Global South.

Elections

From disinformation to microtargeting to surveillance, digital interference in free and fair elections is a rising threat to democracy around the globe. New strategies are necessary to rebuild trust in electoral systems and provide protection against manipulation and exploitation. RightsCon Tunis established a space for industry leaders, civil society experts, and global policymakers to collaborate and develop tactics to increase media literacy, strengthen digital security, and encourage platform accountability.

Migration

Now more than ever, the movement of people across borders and continents has created a critical need to foster digital diasporas and develop new avenues for connectivity. At RightsCon Tunis, humanitarian and human rights experts identified strategies to counter the far-reaching implications of technology on the lives of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. The results speak for themselves: at the conference, participants drafted a roadmap for building a digital identity system for displaced persons, guidelines for developing refugee-focused technologies, and global commitments to establishing a digital platform and knowledge network for the Rohingya community.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence

The ubiquity of digital media has broadened the reach and power of perpetrators of gender-based violence. From trolling and doxxing to cyberstalking and harassment, women and LGBTQI people face disproportionate risks online. The integration of gender-diverse perspectives across the RightsCon Tunis program led to the development of cross-cutting strategies to track online abuse of journalists, protect LGBTQI internet freedoms, and combat targeting of women's rights activists in rural areas.

Program tracks

RightsCon thematic tracks are curated to reflect the breadth and depth of technology's impact on society and human rights. On the final day of RightsCon Tunis, we released *RightsCon Learnings*, a community statement that outlines a starting point for centering human rights in each industry and body of work. Below you will see the statements for each track with notable sessions highlighted.

Artificial intelligence, automation, and algorithmic accountability

As automated decision-making tools proliferate and fundamentally modify the way our societies, institutions and markets work, it is important to acknowledge the existing body of universal, binding, and actionable human rights laws and standards as the foundation upon which these technologies must be designed, developed, and implemented. Preventing discrimination and other human rights abuses requires a commitment to fostering diversity, meaningful consultation with at-risk communities about the particular ways in which they could be impacted, and clear pathways for algorithmic accountability both in the public and private sector when the use of automated technologies undermine fundamental rights. The topics of AI and automated decision-making were incredibly popular throughout the summit, with sessions including: *Do Moderators Dream of Electric Sheep? The potential for AI in regulating online content* by Ofcom and Public Knowledge, *Do Our Faces Deserve the Same Protection as Our Phones? Regulation and governance of facial recognition technology* by Microsoft, and *Beyond the Hype: AI innovation and human rights in the telecoms sector* by Vodafone Group.

Countering online harassment, hate speech, and violent extremism

Current approaches to moderating content can harm human rights, and have often failed to protect vulnerable communities like women, LGBTQ people, ethnic minority groups and others at risk online. Any measures undertaken whether by companies or governments in an effort to remove online content that is considered harmful must serve a legitimate aim and adhere to the principles of legality and proportionality. When making decisions, governments and companies should carefully assess the potential detrimental impact on freedom of expression and access to information online before they deploy any new measure, in particular, to avoid any form of censorship. In addition, any regulation to impact free speech online must be fully compliant with human rights law and developed and adopted through open democratic debate and in full transparency. Any individual impacted by these measures should be afforded due process and adequate remedy. This issue was the subject of rich discussion in the following sessions: *Tackling Terrorist Use of the Internet: A roadmap to holistic and human rights compliant solutions* by Tech Against Terrorism, *Collective Solutions for Catalyzing Change to Address Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An interactive workshop* by the International Center for Research on Women, *Tumblr, Porn, Sex Work and Queer Lives on a Healthy Internet: What happens when a platform decides to kill communities?* by Mozilla Foundation.

Forging alternative models for business and human rights

Companies are responsible for assessing, understanding, and effectively mitigating the impact of their processes, products, and services on human rights, and for helping to remedy abuses. Business models that rely on the exploitation of users' personal data and privacy — as a basis for advertising revenue or a pathway to surveillance — are fundamentally contrary to human rights. Companies both large and small must adopt approaches that integrate human rights-by-design and empower users with autonomy over their data. Private and government investments should foster market diversification by supporting startups and small and medium-sized technology companies, as well as the development of new technologies that are human rights-respecting by design. Participants explored these issues in the following sessions: *A Friend in Need Is a Friend Indeed: Building on the first public statements by business and civil society on business protection of civic freedoms* by Business & Human Rights Resource Centre & International Service for Human Rights, *Technology in Conflict: Assessing platform companies' human rights responsibility and accountability in high-risk settings* by JustPeace Labs & Article One Advisors, and *The Tone from the Top: Setting responsible regulation for tech* by Business for Social Responsibility (BSR).

[LANDMARK SESSION]
The business of privacy – how to profit from protecting personal data

In the last decade, economic systems have grown increasingly receptive to business models that prioritize surveillance, and the collection and monetization of user data. Yet increased media scrutiny of – and public backlash against – these ethically dubious practices have encouraged a number of for-profit companies to adopt alternative business models in which customer privacy is king. As communities and industries re-evaluate the scope of privacy and the power of personal data, the focus should shift to the opportunities, challenges, and potential outcomes when privacy is part of the product.

Show and tell: skill-building for advocacy and campaigning

Advocating for an open internet, free of persecution and harassment is not possible without the participation and resilience of civil society. RightsCon held sessions to highlight this group including: *Citizens or Users? Building the global resistance against platform monopolies* and *Shaping Multilaterals: How civil society can influence and participate in multilateral processes such as the UN or the WTO.* Other sessions explored the need for increased investment in technical innovation in order to empower and expand the movement for human rights in the digital age, including: *Defense Against the Dark Arts: Meme Campaigns* and *Propaganda and Tech Demos: Changing the Name of the Game – New Ways to Raise Awareness.*

Individual and organizational wellness and resiliency

The digital community is well-known to burn the candle at both ends: while many are energized by this intensity, burnout is a damaging reality in our space. Worse, advocates around the world are facing increasing challenges: closing civil society space, online harassment, and even physical risks and abuse by governments and armed groups. There is a real opening for change if we can reconnect with the purpose behind our work, join together to advance our well-being, and tap into the resources to transform our workplaces and advocacy spaces. Organizations, companies, and governments should create and maintain healthy workplace environments to support their sustainability and their overall mission. The civil society space needs to see harmful cultures eliminated and the focus put on establishing healthy habits and processes to create and strengthen work-life balance. Funders should support well-being initiatives and welcome advocates' efforts to create sustainable, resilient organizations. Sessions within this track aimed to address these concerns, some of which included: *Solving the Problem of Vicarious Trauma in Open Source Investigations* by Open Source Investigations and *Hope for Resilience: Shifting the narrative, advancing wellbeing* by Global Justice Clinic - New York University (NYU) School of Law.

Data trust, protection, and user control

Countries around the world must adopt and enforce robust data protection laws to ensure users' personal data are safeguarded at all times. Policy-makers should create legal and regulatory frameworks that put individuals and their rights at the forefront, giving users meaningful and actionable control over their personal data. These frameworks should also require that connected products and online services protect privacy and data protection by design and by default. One of the many sessions with this focus was *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Of the people, by the people, for the people* by East West Management Institute's Open Development Initiative. Data protection principles are especially crucial in the context of digital identity programs, which can bring about great benefits but also severe risk of harm to individuals who are marginalized and underserved — including refugees, migrants, and rural communities. Governments and technology companies should avoid compiling sensitive personal information in centralized databases, and ensure transparency and oversight in determining how data can be accessed. This was highlighted in the RightsCon session: *Data Protection and Refugees: Informed consent in asylum process and access to aid* by Localization Lab & Gesellschaft für Freiheitsrechte - GFF.

Democracy, conflict, and shrinking civic spaces

Governments have an unwavering responsibility to respect civil society and to refrain from any attacks on those who seek to defend human rights, protect democracy, and promote access to information, especially during election cycles and other moments of public importance. Both the public and private sector must prevent and mitigate attacks meant to disrupt democratic and civic processes, which are especially prevalent in fragile democracies and conflict zones. Countermeasures include monitoring electoral processes for digital interference, understanding the impact of online platforms used as mediums for democratic participation, and empowering marginalized voices, especially in times of conflict, to be represented and respected both online and off. RightsCon was privileged to support these efforts by hosting sessions such as: *Enabling Digital Civic Space: A Conversation with UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association* by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and *Fighting for Human Rights and Democracy in the Digital World: New tools, new actors – How to be more efficient?* By Etalab - French government task force for open data and data policy.

[LANDMARK SESSION]
Voter beware! – Microtargeting in political elections and campaigns

In elections around the world, microtargeting is changing the nature of politics and campaigning on a national and global level. Further, the collection and use of data for commercial purposes remains largely unregulated, leading to overt manipulation of human behavior for capitalist gain. This session discussed how, as citizens and as voters, we need to understand these dramatic shifts occurring in our digital media ecosystems, in order to combat targeted information campaigns that seek to sway our opinions and actions.

Justice, jurisdiction, and the rule of law

The internet has imposed significant challenges to jurisdiction and sovereignty, while at the same time opening the door to abuse of people's rights and data on a massive scale, as highlighted in sessions that included: *internet regulation - the good, the bad, the ugly: a model for regulatory effectiveness* and *Tunis +13¾: From the Tunis Agenda to RightsCon Tunis, it's been a lifetime of internet governance.* The lack of clarity around how data can and should move across jurisdictions has eroded the rights of people and the rule of law. Succinct legal and regulatory standards that include digital due process must be established to address these problematic realities. Civil society organizations are often confronted with governments that use their legislative and policy-making powers to de-fund, impede, or even force the disappearance of important actors and voices.

Privacy, surveillance, and individual security

Privacy is the cornerstone of human rights in the digital age, and users are entitled to adequate legal protections. It is the duty of product manufacturers and service providers to design and implement privacy by design. Governments must limit state-sponsored surveillance within, at, and across borders only to what is necessary and proportionate. Laws authorizing — or failing to limit — governments, legal authorities, and technology companies conducting online surveillance must be brought into alignment with international human rights obligations. Companies that create surveillance technologies must account for the human rights impact of their products on at-risk users and prevent the sale of these tools to known human rights abusers. Sessions such as: Landmark: *The Global State of Surveillance Tech - In Conversation with UN Special Rapporteurs*, Landmark: *Tracked - Pitfalls and Promises of Digital Identification Systems, You're Not Just a Pretty Face: Biometric surveillance has moved beyond face recognition - how do we stop it?* By Electronic Frontier Foundation, and *It Always Feels like Somebody's Watching You: The impact of U.S. foreign intelligence surveillance on journalists* by The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press highlighted the importance of these discussions.

The digital disruption of philanthropy

Funding relationship models should put recipients at the forefront of programmatic design and implementation. It is essential to foster financial sustainability and protection for recipients through healthy donor-grantee relationships. These models should adapt and respond effectively to state strategies that are aimed at undermining and degrading the financial health of organizations in order to disrupt the services of the people they serve. Within this track, RightsCon held sessions that included: *Reverse-Engineering an RFP: Making Beneficiaries the Boss* by Internews and *Meet the Funders: An OTR Q&A with donors* by U.S. Department of State.

[LANDMARK SESSION]
Philanthropy in the 21st century

The challenges facing modern philanthropy – including attacks on traditional funding, shrinking civic spaces, the explosion of data, and the emergence of new technologies – are many and varied. This session highlighted how the philanthropic sector needs to adapt in order to effectively respond to new threats and opportunities, donors must overcome self-generated silos, and the industry must prioritize leadership development and alternative, more equitable methods of funding.

Turn it on and #keepiton: connectivity and shutdowns

The internet should be accessible to all, without favoring or discriminating against certain communities, websites, applications, or services. In pursuit of that goal, governments and telecommunications service providers — in consultation with civil society — should ensure connectivity initiatives respect human rights, benefit and empower local users, and support alternative internet infrastructures modeled on decentralization and resilience.

Equally important to bringing people online, governments and service providers must commit to keeping them there. Intentional network disruptions, including blocking of social media platforms and messaging applications, pose a serious threat to free expression, association, assembly, and access to information, alongside their negative impact on work, education, access to healthcare, and beyond. Telecommunications service providers should, at a minimum, commit to transparency around government requests for blocking, and judicial oversight bodies should assist to the greatest extent possible in enforcing legal obligations to refrain from shutting down the internet. RightsCon continues to play an active role in this space to ensure participants are equipped with the most current information, delivering sessions such as: *Millimeter Waves, Small Cells, Beamforming* by Global Network Initiative, *Oh My! Anticipating and addressing human rights impacts in a 5G environment and The State of Internet Shutdowns in 2019* by Global Network Initiative.

Lock and key: cybersecurity and encryption

Governments should not pursue cybersecurity strategies that seek unilateral control over the internet and instead should focus on norms, regulations, principles, and practices that enable and promote the protection of individual users and their data. These measures should afford users the capacity and resources to defend themselves from cyber attacks and mitigate exposure to cyber risks. Government intervention aimed to weaken or undermine encryption creates cybersecurity risks that can potentially interfere with the human rights of users, disrupt the digital economy, and harm the integrity of critical infrastructure. Therefore, investing in and adopting strong encryption tools that meet the highest international standards for cybersecurity practices is essential to ensure community safety. Sessions included: *Decolonising Cyberpolicy: Developing a Cyberpolicy Framework Relevant to the Global South* by Research ICT Africa - South Africa, *The Centre for Internet & Society and Callisto: Combating sexual assault through cryptography* by Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence.

The future of media in the age of misinformation

In the face of widespread misinformation wielded to undermine democratic discourse, cultivate polarization, and minimize the visibility of credible stories, traditional media sources should confront their eroding legitimacy and adopt new models for success. The media landscape must continue to diversify, empower readers with better tools and literacy skills, incorporate reliable fact-checking mechanisms, and deliver consistently higher quality reporting. Those confronting misinformation must also consider the privacy invasive business models that have contributed to its popularity and enabled its weaponization. These discussions have reappeared over the years at RightsCon as it has been more prevalent globally. Some of the sessions that dealt with this topic included: *Visual Investigations at the New York Times: Innovations in Truth Telling* by The New York Times and *Online Media and Misinformation: You ask, youth answers* by Open Source Investigations.

Intersectionality on the internet: diversity and representation

With approximately four billion individuals connected to the internet and four billion yet to come online, we are at an important inflection point in ensuring the internet is a space by and for everyone. Governments, tech companies, development agencies, civil society organizations, and all other stakeholders must broaden our understanding of who the internet does and does not serve, accounting for questions of accessibility and language, gender-based violence and discrimination, and more. Session such as: *The Big Dataset in the Sky: Challenging geographies of discrimination* by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and *Beyond Dating Apps: LGBTQ people in other online platforms* by Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence are examples of sessions that gave insight on these issues. It is critical that marginalised populations, such as indigenous peoples, LGBTQ individuals, religious and cultural minorities, and people of color, are at the forefront of decision-making processes that impact the future of digital spaces.

Tech for public good: open government and smart cities

The use of technology in public life should be centered around transparency, openness, and human rights, in particular, privacy and security, as the pillars of trustworthy public services that enhance the overall well-being of citizens. Technology that is deployed in urban or rural spaces must always be used equitably and inclusively, and never generate new pathways of exclusion. The development of smart cities and the implementation of safety and security programs must never come at the cost of individuals' freedoms through data collection and surveillance. Sessions within this track included: *Making Civic Tech Work for Democracy: Lessons from Tunisia, Nigeria* by Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), and *Smart Cities: Their future or yours?* by The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

The impact of technology on the sustainable development goals

Digital technologies are core enablers of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, but their integration must be done responsibly, with full understanding and mitigation of their impact on privacy and other fundamental human rights. Further, the tech sector must account for its own impact on sustainable development, on issues ranging from the environment and human health to land rights to fair labor practices. The technology, human rights, and development sectors must work together, in coordination and cohesion, to effectively advance toward a more equitable and sustainable world for everyone. In order to tackle these issues RightsCon hosted sessions including *Climate Change Under Construction: an environmentally sustainable Internet* by Pangea & UPC and *Catalyzing Sustainable Development: Youth, peace, security and ICTs* by Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

Solve my problem

Solve My Problem sessions are closed-door conversations that encourage participants to devise actionable strategies to resolve a specific and defined problem at the intersection of human rights and technology. Read below to learn more about the problem and results of 6 sessions piloted at RightsCon Tunis.

On financial inclusion

The problem statement:

Tunisia currently does not allow residents or companies to make international payment transfers. The restricted flow of money and goods from outside of the country poses a major barrier to ongoing efforts to globalize Tunisia's economy, and stymies the market power of local entrepreneurs, growth-oriented SMEs, civil society actors, and everyday Tunisians.

The result and what's next:

1. The Central Bank of Tunisia agreed to initiate negotiations with relevant stakeholders in order to establish an international payment system, and will coordinate with other Central Banks in the Maghreb on methods to develop an effective system.
2. The International Financial Corporation (IFC) committed to provide technical support for financial institutions in order to build a stable infrastructure for an international payment system.
3. The company Stripe announced a preliminary agreement to operate their Stripe Atlas payment tool made especially for startups.
4. Participants of the session agreed to form a steering committee to advance the project, and to identify solutions to any legal and regulatory gaps.

On artificial intelligence

The problem statement:

The lack of cohesion among the many public and private sector actors invested in rights-based, ethical approaches to artificial intelligence (AI) has led to duplicated efforts and unnecessary competition for limited resources. AI is a relatively new and unexplored field of study and innovation, and better alignment of mission and aims across the sector would enable all interested parties to work more effectively and maximize impact.

The result and what's next:

1. Session participants articulated a shared goal to ensure that AI is developed in a rights-respecting manner.
2. In order to better define AI, participants created a toolkit to build out and define what "AI policy" entails, which will allow academics, civil society actors, policymakers, and businesses to set parameters on AI research and advocacy.
3. Participants committed to designing a collaborative, dynamic resource to debunk common myths and inaccuracies about AI.

On digital ID

The problem statement:

The emerging field of digital identification (ID) has attracted the attention of a wide array of stakeholders at both national and international levels. Despite a shared interest in promoting digital ID programs that respect human rights, no effective and comprehensive coordination mechanism currently exists for the various entities, companies, governments, and organizations invested in this issue.

The result and what's next:

1. Session participants identified a greater need for communication and collaboration among civil society organizations, which could be achieved through an email list and regular side meetings at important international events.
2. Participants examined similarities across centralized national digital identity programs around the world, especially in the global south, and noted that the structure of these systems puts marginalized communities, such as refugees, more at risk of human rights violations.
3. Participants established that the implementation of centralized digital identity programs should be approached with skepticism and that strategic advocacy is required toward stakeholders and decision makers, particularly in multilateral institutions, aid organizations, and governments.

On shutdowns and disinformation

The problem statement:

Increasingly authoritarian and nondemocratic regimes are using the specter of disinformation to justify internet shutdowns in the midst of elections and other key political moments. In order to develop nuanced policy and advocacy positions for shutdown situations, in which the threat of disinformation is either actual or invented, it is first necessary to decouple legitimate and illegitimate threats, and identify unique criteria for each of these scenarios.

The result and what's next:

1. There was a consensus that more work is needed to understand why governments shut down the internet. With this in mind, more Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Rights to Information (RTI) need to be filed in numerous countries to get the official justification for shutdowns.
2. The fact-checking community needs to be more involved in shutdowns related work.
3. Media literacy must be improved as it is paramount in the fight against disinformation and shutdowns.
4. Those advocating for full access to the internet must help governments understand how disinformation works and provide alternatives to shutdowns.

On content moderation

The problem statement:

How can we rebuild trust and accountability on platforms that often fail to vet hateful and harmful content, while protecting the fundamental right to freedom of speech? This session aimed to reconcile diverse civil society perspectives on content moderation, identify regulatory architectures that can best advance content moderation practices grounded in human rights standards and principles, and carve out a strategic path forward to engage policymakers.

The result and what's next:

1. Participants created a methodology to discuss the general principles of content moderation in-depth. This methodology consisted of key questions about regulatory feasibility and compatibility with human rights standards.

2. Participants agreed on the need for a centralized vault of resources to track regulatory and multistakeholder developments on the issue.

3. There was a consensus on the utility of discussions like the Solve My Problem sessions to bring people from different cultural backgrounds and legal systems together in order to find common ground.

On indigenous data sovereignty

The problem statement:

Open data principles are currently in contradiction with the principles of indigenous data sovereignty, the notion that indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities must be granted the right to control the use of their data. How can indigenous data sovereignty be promoted and mainstreamed within open data movements, taking into consideration indigenous knowledge, data ownership, collection, and use, licensing, privacy, and remuneration?

The result and what's next:

1. Participants identified four primary areas of concern and barriers for indigenous data sovereignty: lack of self-determination to identify community membership, intellectual property protocols, absence of indigenous data governance, and scarcity of free prior and informed consent for data collection.

2. Participants committed to initiate a meet-up session at the local level in order to share and raise awareness of Indigenous data issues, and report back on localized experiences and tools to the group.

3. Participants launched an Indigenous working group and committed themselves to contacting different regional and international indigenous networks in order to invite members to international forums and events around data governance, such as RightsCon.

Community highlights

[LANDMARK SESSION]
2018 Human Rights Heroes Awards

Every year, Access Now celebrates heroes of human rights in the digital age from around the world. At RightsCon Tunis, we honored Bahrani digital security trainer Mohammed al-Maskati; Australian lawyer and anti-surveillance advocate Lizzie O'Shea; Zaituni Njovu, founder of the Zaina Foundation in Tanzania; Indian researcher and activist Dr. Usha Ramanathan; and Marianne Díaz Hernández, a Venezuelan lawyer and researcher with Derechos Digitales. The awards were presented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet.

The RightsCon community

As RightCon and the community that it convenes continue to grow every year, upholding its diversity and representation is our highest priority. Involving a wide range of stakeholders representing different regions, gender identities, and schools of thought is essential for facilitating a resilient and constructive space in which to build a rights-respecting future. This year, participants hailed from 122 different countries – an increase from the 118 we saw at RightsCon Toronto.

In examining the regional breakdown of this year's 2,797 participants – the largest participant rate in our summit's history – similar trends to previous years can be observed. A majority of the participants came from the same continent as the host city, as 36% came from Africa. Of all participants, 6% came from Asia-Pacific, 21.5% from Europe, 5% from Latin America, 6% from the Middle East, and 22% from North America.

We continued RightsCon's commitment to gender parity and representation in Tunis, with a majority of participants self-identifying as female (47%) or gender non-binary (7%) for the third year in a row.

The decision to hold this year's summit in Tunisia, and in the Middle East and North Africa region more generally, also came with the responsibility to ensure the region's most pressing issues were addressed during the summit. The RightsCon Team relied on a trusted network of Regional Champions, who provided invaluable thought leadership, programmatic orientation, and guidance in the lead up to, and during RightsCon Tunis.

A special thank you to our regional champions

This carefully selected group of experts, defenders, and leaders in the human rights space ensured that the RightsCon program reflected the work being done in the region. A special thank you to Mohammed al-Maskati (Bahrain Center for Human Rights), Mohamed Najem (SMEX), Saloua Ghazouani (Article 19), Sarah Aoun (technologist), Khaled Ben-Younes (Ministry of Communication Technologies and Digital Economy), Afef Abrougui (Global Voices), Noomane Fehri (B@T Labs), Stephanie Willman Bordat (MRA Women), Nadim Nashif (7amleh - The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement), Barbara Ibrahim (American University in Cairo), Mawjoudin, Dalia Othman (Jeem), Ouided Bouchamaoui (UTICA) and Saida Kouzzi (MRA Women).

Relying on our local and international partners was also critical in ensuring community safety and security during RightsCon. This year, for the first time, we implemented a secure summit zone in order to convene a space that was safe and productive for all participants. Through extensive community consultations and collaboration with members of at-risk communities, we published our approach in several blog posts, worked to adapt our program to support sensitive conversations, developed general and technical security guides, and strengthened our policies and response mechanisms.

Recognizing the financial barriers that members of our community may face in joining us, RightsCon was proud to offer over 2,000 free tickets to participants from around the world. We also doubled the reach of our travel support program this year, providing varying levels of travel assistance to participants from 42 countries. Our ticket discount policy and travel support process also affords the opportunity to amplify those voices that may be neglected in favor of the dominant narratives espoused by the global north, with 85% of the recipients identifying as global south stakeholders. The RightsCon Team is enthusiastic to continue our travel support process next year and beyond, so that the summit can continue to benefit from, and reflect the diverse, global perspectives of our community.

Launches, outcomes, and achievements

Official statement calling for the protection of human rights in digital spaces

UN Special Rapporteurs David Kaye (freedom of opinion and expression), Michel Forst (the situation of human rights defenders), and Clément Voule (freedom of peaceful assembly and association), *released an official statement* at RightsCon calling on States to ensure that human rights are respected and protected in the digital arena.

Over the past few years, the rapporteurs have presented reports and sent a plethora of communications to various States addressing Internet shutdowns in times of election and or transition. This statement is only the beginning as they will continue to discuss issues spanning surveillance technologies, press freedom, content moderation, and data protection.

[LANDMARK SESSION]
The global state of surveillance tech – in conversation with un special rapporteurs

Across the globe, surveillance technology is increasingly being used to monitor and target activists, journalists, and users at risk. This Landmark hosted United Nations Special Rapporteurs Michel Forst, David Kaye, and Agnès Callamard for a discussion on the impact of surveillance tech on the safety of human rights defenders, the preservation of freedom of expression, and the prosecution of extrajudicial killings.

#KeepItOn campaign in Sudan

During RightsCon, Access Now's #KeepItOn coalition launched a campaign condemning the internet shutdowns in Sudan. While the internet was shut off, several reports indicate that more than 100 people have been killed, over 700 injured, and at least 70 raped.

This is not the first time Sudan has shut down the internet, but this round of shutdowns differ from previous ones. This time, internet shutdowns have been directly followed by reports of systematic and organized killings and looting by the Transitional Military Council (TMC). Just before mobile internet was shut down, the TMC, which has been negotiating with opposition groups to set up a transitional civilian government, withdrew from the negotiations and sent in the Janjaweed militia in a reported murderous attack on peaceful protesters.

According to people in Sudan that Access Now spoke with, the military has confiscated and destroyed mobile phones and other electronic devices of protesters to prevent documented atrocities from being shared with the world.

RightsCon Tunis learnings

At the beginning of this year's RightsCon, Access Now released the RightsCon *Tunis Learnings*, a community statement that captures the richness and diversity of the debate in Tunis. The statement is a starting point for centering human rights in each industry and body of work. With this, Access Now encourages the broader global stakeholder community to incorporate these ideas across sectors towards their own goals.

Digital Rights Briefing for Ambassadors

Occuring on the final day of RightsCon, representatives from civil society organizations in Tunisia and the region met and briefed ambassadors on on relevant topics.

Ambassadors and representatives from the embassies of Canada, the United States of America and Sweden, amongst others, were present at the briefing. The meeting began with a discussion defining digital rights and outlining the Tunisian context. The invited partners gave presentations about election integrity and the erosion of democratic values, privacy and societal control, cybersecurity privacy, and misinformation and the future of journalism. Afterwards, attendees discussed coordination post-RightsCon Tunis and many government representatives made commitments to be more involved in improving digital rights in the region.

Third annual rightscon young leaders summit

RightsCon Tunis hosted the third annual RightsCon Young Leaders Summit, a satellite event held before the start of official programming. The Young Leaders Summit hosted over 40 young people from nearly 15 countries to discuss key issues in the space. The program was largely led by young people and included interactive discussions on tactics to address misinformation, the role of text analysis in hate speech, and undertaking due diligence in artificial intelligence.

Report calls on Facebook to address hate speech targeting marginalized groups in India

Thenmozhi Soundararajan, the executive director of Equality Labs, a South Asian-American organisation that works on issues of technology and human rights, *released a report* detailing claims that Facebook has consistently failed to protect its users, who are part of marginalized communities.

In the report, Soundararajan describes Facebook India's inability to follow their own community guidelines to protect the rights of marginalized castes and users of the platform who are part of a religious minority. The report details the ways in which the company's existing mechanisms to address hate speech have failed communities in India. Equality Labs found that 93% of the posts it reported to Facebook that contained speech against their listed rules remained on the platform.

Based on the report, Equality Labs is calling for an independent audit of Facebook's influence on human rights in India, following a similar audit in the United States in 2018. Secondly, the organization is calling for Facebook to ensure that there are content reviewers for all or a majority of the 22 officially recognized regional languages in India. Lastly, they call on Facebook to improve their response time when posts are reported, as it is currently averages 48 hours, which they consider slow given the dire real-world consequences of targeted hate speech online.

Screening of different regional and international indigenous networks

During the Solve My Problem session on Indigenous Data Sovereignty, a mapping of different regional and international indigenous networks was created. The mapping seeks to facilitate the inclusion and representation of indigenous people to international forums and events around data governance, such as RightsCon Costa Rica. While the network is still new, it is currently being used as a tool to engage and collaborate effectively with one another in order to bolster the importance of digital rights within the Indigenous community.

RightsCon UX Event

For the first time at RightsCon, the UX and Human Rights event brought together designers, UX researchers and practitioners, tool team representatives, and digital security trainers to grow a community that advocates for rights-respecting and consent-based user experiences. This event mapped out the need for future organizing and gathering, and shaped the agenda and priorities for establishing an ecosystem that allows for symbiosis and collaboration between the people who design tools and the people who use them.

Tunis 13 ¾: from the Tunis agenda to RightsCon Tunis

In 2005, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) convened in Tunis launched the Tunis Agenda – a consensus statement that called for the creation of the Internet Governance Forum. This session facilitated both a reflection and an examination of all that has and has not been achieved in the last nearly 14 years by those who had been present for its creation. Together, participants strategized on keeping the Tunis Agenda alive and thriving, particularly with new challenges posed by emerging technologies, like artificial intelligence, to its core values and principles.

Testimonials

"[RightsCon] remains immeasurably beneficial to have the time and space to meet peers and stakeholders in person throughout the conference. Although we are often in regular contact by email and calls it goes without saying that nothing compares to face-to-face discussions to advance and inform our respective work. Equally, I believe that RightsCon remains the most effective and informed forum to understand the Internet community's priorities and direction from the conference sessions, side-meetings and bilateral meetings."

—

Michael Karimian, Senior Manager, Human Rights, Microsoft

"RightsCon is an online and offline space to build relationships on the digital rights' agenda among actors and communities from diverse sectors and geographical locations. It allows people to imagine and strategize in the same space how digital technologies can create better and safer understandings between different societies."

—

Alejandro Mayoral Banos,
Executive Director,
Indigenous Friends Organization

"It was very interesting to see activists of different countries cooperating with each other and sharing ideas. I'm very grateful for the Human Rights Heroes Award that I received. I learned and connected with Digital Security Trainers from Sub Saharan Africa and I hope we will be working together to promote internet freedom in Tanzania as well as outside of the country."

—

Zaituni Njovu, CEO, Zaituni Foundation

"I found the conference to be game-changing for my work in the peace and security sector in the UN, in that it pulled together actors from the private sector, NGOs, activist world and UN who can speak powerfully to the core issues. The multiple tracks allowed for a lot of flexibility and provided a real wealth of global expertise on all the issues that I needed to gain current insight on, and unexpected areas as well. The many tracks spoke directly to the heart of the core issue: the mixed impact of a technology-infused world on citizens, institutions, and governments who haven't reconciled the market economy dynamics with long-standing norms and expectations on human rights. Complicated, yet RightsCon opened up multiple conversations that I am continuing to this day. Thank you for organizing this excellent space for dialogue."

—

Christina Goodness, Chief, DPPA-DPO Information Management Unit, United Nations

"RightsCon was a big eye-opener for me and well worth attending. It really brought to life the growing overlap between the digital and human rights worlds, and just how important it is to understand the issues involved. The UK government would get a lot of value out of attending future RightsCon Summits."

—

Paul Edwards, Joint Head, Human Rights Policy Unit, Foreign & Commonwealth Office

"Perhaps the most striking, joyous, part of it was being at a conference where diversity in all its forms was essential to its lifeblood - in contrast to most conferences I attend where diversity is too often thought of in terms of checking boxes."

—

Bec Hamilton, Assistant Law Professor, American University

Looking forward to RightsCon Costa Rica

Regional impact & future plans for the region

Since 2013, Access Now has maintained a strong presence within the Middle East and North Africa region, through our office located in Tunis. Alongside the small number of organizations in the region working on digital rights, the Tunis office conducts important technological, policy and advocacy support for local and regional users at risk. These users include civil society organizations and activists, human rights defenders, independent journalists and bloggers, the LGBTQ+ community, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups.

RightsCon Tunis was an opportunity to host important conversations – whether highlighting how civic technology works for democracy in Tunisia, strategizing on countering hate speech against LGBTQ people in the MENA region, or discussing rights-based cybersecurity strategies in practice. The groundwork laid out in these sessions have already begun to materialize into tangible opportunities for moving forward human rights work in Tunisia and the region.

Although so much has been done over the past year, the work is far from over, as the Tunis office plans to work with the regional community to build on the momentum of RightsCon. Key issue areas identified as critical in the coming months include access to information, surveillance tech, corporate accountability, and data protection.

RightsCon Costa Rica (June 9-12, 2020)

Looking forward to RightsCon 2020 and building upon the success of our first RightsCon summit in Africa and the Middle East and North Africa region, Access Now is proud to host the ninth installment of RightsCon in San José, Costa Rica. This will be our first summit in Central America, and a much-anticipated return to Latin America after RightsCon Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

From Mexico to Panama, across the Caribbean, and throughout South America, every key question at the intersection of human rights and technology is under debate. For many in the region, it is becoming increasingly difficult to securely advance their work. Since RightsCon Rio, the Latin American digital rights community has grown tremendously, achieving important victories both locally and on a global scale, yet there is still much work left to be done.

As in Tunis, at RightsCon Costa Rica, we aim to provide a platform for individuals working in very difficult conditions to safely and productively meet with their peers from the region and around the world, and to facilitate discussions that advance human rights, amplify the voices of those at risk, and showcase the extraordinary strength and resiliency of the Latin American digital rights community.

Costa Rica is home to many international organizations, including the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, a rich academic scene, a diverse community of technologists and developers, and strong feminist and LGBTQ rights movements, as well as a wide range of indigenous and local communities and one of the most biodiverse environments in the world. The country serves as an important model for the promotion of peace, human rights, and the rule of law in the region.

Over the next year, members of the Access Now team and the digital rights community as a whole will be working hard to further understand the societal implications of artificial intelligence, hold tech companies and governments accountable for improper content moderation, fight internet shutdowns and disinformation, and ensure that algorithmic decision-making systems are used to benefit individuals and societies. We will also be working on cementing the global recognition and importance of indigenous and environmental issues within the digital rights sphere. These issues are just a small sample size of what is yet to come at RightsCon Costa Rica 2020. We hope to see you there!

RightsCon Tunis 2019

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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 or Access Now, contract **Brett Solomon**, Executive Director, at **brett@accessnow.org** or **Nikki Gladstone**, RightsCon Director at **nikki@accessnow.org.**

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