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Executive Summary

On 17 June 2026, during the 62nd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC62), the Council held an Interactive Dialogue with Ms Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The discussion focused on the growing impact of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on the freedom of expression and access to information.

In presenting her report, *Freedom of expression in new frontiers: Governing the digital sphere in the age of artificial intelligence* (A/HRC/62/67), Ms Khan warned that the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI), digital surveillance technologies, and the increasing concentration of power among governments and major technology companies pose significant challenges to the exercise of freedom of expression. She stressed that technological innovation has outpaced existing governance frameworks and highlighted the need for stronger human rights protections within digital environments.

During the dialogue, States, regional organisations, United Nations entities, and civil society organisations discussed the implications of artificial intelligence, online content moderation, digital surveillance, disinformation, and platform governance. Participants emphasised the importance of balancing innovation with human rights protections and ensuring that freedom of expression remains protected both online and offline.

Background

Freedom of opinion and expression is a fundamental human right protected under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). This right includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The digital revolution has transformed communication, access to information, political participation, and public discourse. Digital platforms have enabled unprecedented global connectivity and created new opportunities for civic engagement. However, these developments have also generated significant challenges related to privacy, surveillance, content moderation, misinformation, disinformation, and the concentration of informational power among a limited number of State and corporate actors.

Recent advances in **AI** have accelerated these concerns. AI systems increasingly influence the information individuals encounter online through recommendation algorithms, automated moderation systems, targeted advertising, predictive analytics, and generative technologies. While these innovations provide substantial benefits, they also create risks related to bias, discrimination, information manipulation, censorship, and restrictions on the freedom of expression.

The international community has increasingly recognised the need to establish governance frameworks capable of protecting human rights while addressing the challenges posed by emerging technologies. The report presented by the Special Rapporteur contributes to this growing discussion by examining how freedom of expression can be safeguarded in an increasingly digital world.

Summary of the Expert's Report

In her report, *Freedom of expression in new frontiers: Governing the digital sphere in the age of artificial intelligence* (A/HRC/62/67), Ms Irene Khan examined the profound transformation of the information ecosystem resulting from advances in digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

The report argued that the digital sphere has become a central space for political participation, public debate, access to information, and the exercise of freedom of expression. At the same time, the report highlighted how a growing concentration of power among governments and major technology companies has fundamentally altered the governance of information and communication.

Ms Khan expressed concern regarding the increasing use of surveillance technologies, algorithmic decision-making systems, and artificial intelligence tools that can influence, filter, amplify, or suppress information. The report warned that inadequate transparency and accountability mechanisms have enabled both public and private actors to exercise unprecedented control over information flows and digital communications.

Particular attention was given to the role of artificial intelligence in shaping public discourse. The report examined the impact of recommendation algorithms, automated content moderation systems, generative AI technologies, and large-scale data collection practices. While acknowledging the potential benefits of AI for innovation and development, the report stressed

that insufficient oversight may contribute to discrimination, information manipulation, censorship, and violations of human rights.

The Special Rapporteur emphasised that freedom of expression must remain a guiding principle in the governance of digital technologies. She called for human rights-centred approaches to AI regulation, greater transparency regarding algorithmic systems, stronger safeguards against unlawful surveillance, and meaningful accountability for both States and technology companies.

The report further recommended enhanced international cooperation, independent oversight mechanisms, human rights impact assessments, and regulatory frameworks designed to ensure that technological development remains consistent with international human rights standards.



Presentation by the Special Rapporteur

Ms Irene Khan presented her report, *Freedom of expression in new frontiers: Governing the digital sphere in the age of artificial intelligence (A/HRC/62/67)*, warning that the rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the global information environment. While acknowledging the opportunities provided by technological innovation, she stressed that digital transformation has also created unprecedented risks for the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

She highlighted the growing concentration of power among major technology companies and State authorities, noting that a small number of actors increasingly influence how information is produced, distributed, moderated, and consumed. According to the Special Rapporteur, this concentration of power raises significant concerns regarding transparency, accountability, democratic participation, and the protection of fundamental rights.

Ms Khan expressed particular concern regarding the proliferation of digital surveillance technologies. She explained that sophisticated monitoring tools are increasingly being used to track online activity, collect personal data, and monitor communications, often without adequate legal safeguards or independent oversight. She warned that such practices may create a chilling effect on journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and individuals seeking to exercise their right to freedom of expression.

A central theme of her presentation was the impact of **AI** on public discourse. She argued that AI systems increasingly shape access to information through recommendation algorithms, automated content moderation, targeted advertising, predictive analytics, and generative technologies. While recognising the potential benefits of AI, she cautioned that insufficient regulation and oversight have enabled serious risks to emerge. In this context, she remarked that “AI has run amok,” expressing concern that technological innovation is advancing more rapidly than the governance frameworks needed to protect human rights.

The Special Rapporteur also addressed the spread of disinformation, misinformation, and information manipulation in digital spaces. She warned that both State and non-State actors are increasingly exploiting digital platforms to influence public opinion, suppress dissenting voices, and distort public debate. At the same time, she stressed that efforts to combat harmful content must remain fully consistent with international human rights law and should not serve as a pretext for censorship or disproportionate restrictions on legitimate expression.

Ms Khan further emphasised the need for greater transparency in algorithmic systems, stronger accountability mechanisms for digital platforms, and human rights impact assessments for emerging technologies. She called upon States to ensure that regulatory frameworks governing artificial intelligence and digital technologies are firmly grounded in international human rights law and developed through inclusive, transparent, and participatory processes.

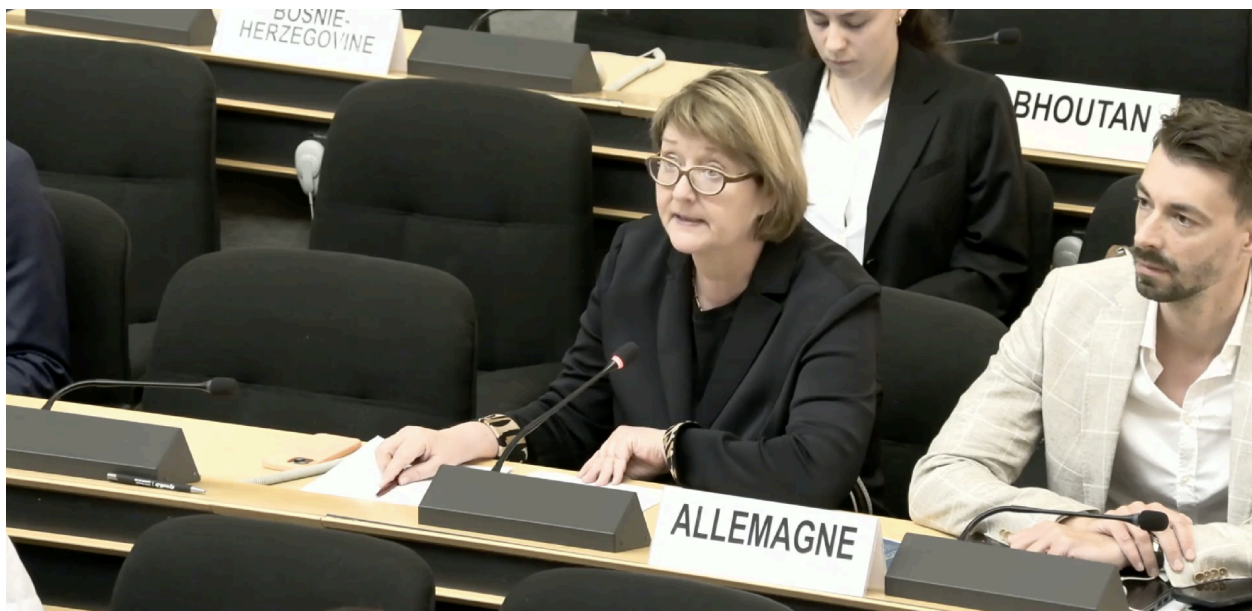
Throughout her presentation, Ms Khan reiterated that freedom of expression is both an individual right and an essential foundation for democratic governance, public accountability, and meaningful civic participation. She called upon States, technology companies, and international

organisations to adopt human rights-centred approaches to digital governance, strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms, and ensure that emerging technologies serve the public interest rather than undermine fundamental freedoms.

Statements by States and Regional Groups

Numerous delegations welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur and expressed concern regarding the growing impact of artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, disinformation, and algorithmic governance on freedom of opinion and expression. While many delegations recognised the opportunities created by emerging technologies, they stressed that human rights protections must remain central to digital governance frameworks.

European Union



Speaking on behalf of the European Union, the representative from Germany highlighted the challenges posed by an increasingly digital world and stressed the importance of protecting freedom of expression online. The delegation referenced the European Union's Digital Services Act and Artificial Intelligence Act as examples of efforts to ensure greater transparency, accountability, and human rights safeguards in digital environments. The EU also raised concerns regarding disinformation, synthetic media, surveillance technologies, and the financial sustainability of diverse and independent media.

The Republic of Finland (on behalf of the Media Freedom Coalition)



Speaking on behalf of Finland and the United Kingdom as co-chairs of the Media Freedom Coalition, the representative emphasised the importance of strengthening conditions for free, independent, and pluralistic media. The delegation asked how States could better support journalism and media freedom in an increasingly complex digital environment and welcomed the recommendations presented by the Special Rapporteur.

Canada (on behalf of Federative Republic of Brasil, Fiji, Namibia, the Netherlands, Kingdom of Sweden and Canada)



Speaking on behalf of a cross-regional group of States, Canada highlighted profound global transformations affecting the exercise of freedom of opinion and expression, particularly for vulnerable groups, including women and girls. The delegation stressed the importance of ensuring that technological developments contribute to the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms rather than reinforcing discrimination and exclusion.

African Group



Speaking on behalf of African States, the representative recognised that artificial intelligence and digital technologies offer significant opportunities to expand access to information, education, and inclusion. At the same time, the Group expressed concern regarding disinformation, hate speech, online violence, and information manipulation. The delegation also underscored the important role played by journalists, particularly in situations of conflict and humanitarian crisis.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

Speaking on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the representative focused heavily on the safety of journalists and media narratives concerning conflicts in the Middle East. The delegation condemned restrictions on journalism in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and stated that media portrayals frequently contribute to the dehumanisation and stigmatisation of Palestinians and Muslims.



The OIC further raised concerns regarding Islamophobia, racist stereotypes, and attacks on journalists operating in conflict environments. The representative asserted that persistent Islamophobic and racist narratives serve as an ideological underpinning enabling what the delegation described as the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people.

The Republic of Austria(on behalf of a group of States)



Austria delivered a statement focused on the protection of journalists in conflict situations. The representative noted that 186 journalists were reportedly killed while covering wars and armed conflicts between 2022 and 2026 and highlighted that approximately 85 per cent of such cases remain unresolved. The delegation stressed that a free and independent press is essential for democratic governance and accountability.

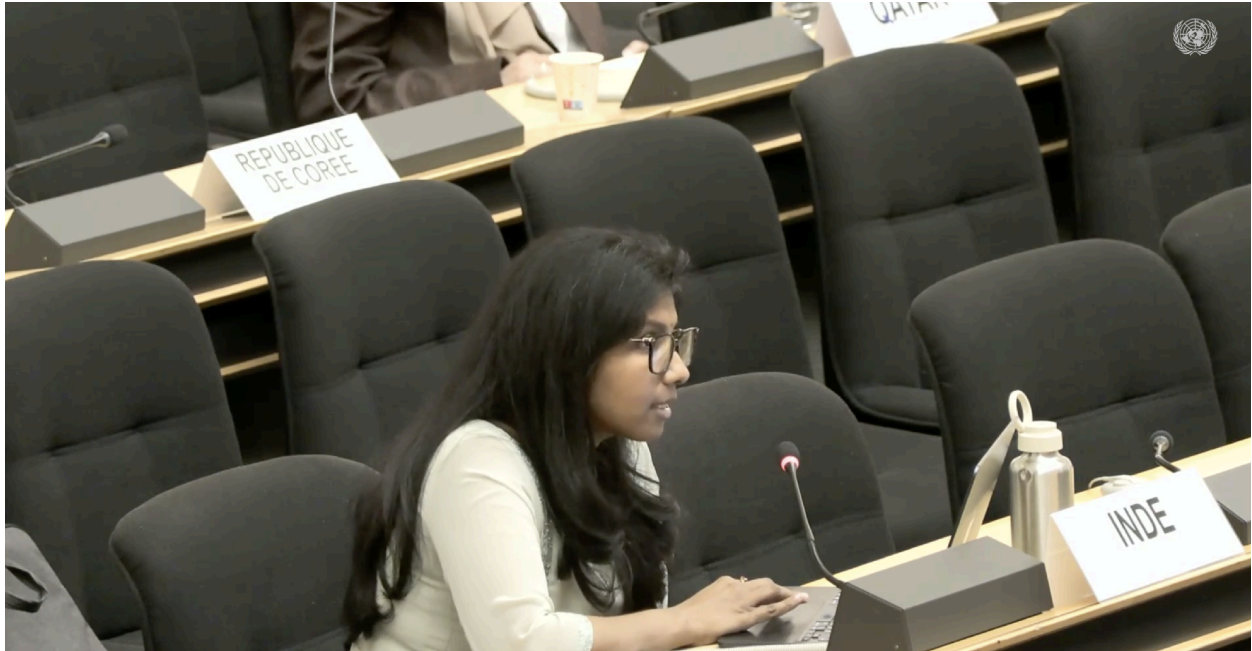
The Kingdom of the Netherlands



The Netherlands warned that the rapid rise and adoption of artificial intelligence is fundamentally reshaping the global information environment. The delegation expressed concern regarding the impact of AI on individual rights, democratic participation, and public trust while also highlighting the increasing number of journalists killed in conflicts including Ukraine, Sudan, and Gaza.

The Republic of India

India expressed reservations regarding aspects of the Special Rapporteur's report, arguing that certain findings reflected persistent biases and inconsistencies. The delegation emphasised that States face legitimate challenges related to cybercrime, child exploitation, disinformation, and online harms and stressed the importance of maintaining appropriate regulatory tools to address these threats.



The Russian Federation



The Russian Federation criticised what it described as the growing convergence between State authorities and digital corporations in certain countries. The delegation alleged that Russian-speaking populations in Baltic States face discrimination and asserted that individuals defending their rights are frequently subjected to intimidation and repression.

The Republic of Türkiye



Türkiye argued that one of the gravest threats to freedom of expression today is the convergence of power between dominant States and large technology companies. The delegation also raised concerns regarding discrimination against Muslim communities and restrictions affecting religious expression in certain countries

The People's Republic of China



The representative of China rejected several findings contained in the Special Rapporteur's report, arguing that it relied upon misinformation and unsubstantiated allegations concerning China's domestic policies, including the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law. The delegation criticised what it described as the politicisation of human rights issues and called upon mandate holders to respect the principles of objectivity, impartiality, and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States. China further stressed that freedom of expression should not be used as a pretext to undermine national security, social stability, or public order.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan



Speaking on behalf of Afghanistan, the representative highlighted the severe restrictions imposed on women and journalists under Taliban rule. The delegation noted that women journalists have been disproportionately affected by measures restricting their participation in public life, including prohibitions on attending official events and limitations on their ability to work in media institutions. Afghanistan stressed that many journalists continue to operate under conditions of intimidation and fear and warned that the systematic suppression of women's voices represents one of the most serious contemporary threats to freedom of expression. The delegation called upon the international community to continue supporting independent media and journalists working under repressive conditions.

United Kingdom



The representative of the United Kingdom reaffirmed the importance of protecting freedom of opinion and expression both online and offline. Speaking as a co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition, the delegation stressed the need to strengthen international cooperation to safeguard journalists, independent media, and civic space in the digital environment. The United Kingdom highlighted the importance of greater transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights in the design, governance, and regulation of digital platforms and emerging artificial intelligence technologies. The delegation welcomed the Special Rapporteur's report and emphasised that technological innovation should reinforce, rather than undermine, democratic participation, media freedom, and the protection of fundamental rights.

Statements by United Nations Bodies

Representatives of United Nations entities highlighted the growing impact of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on the exercise of fundamental human rights. Speakers stressed the importance of ensuring that technological innovation remains consistent with international human rights standards and contributes to equitable access to information, civic participation, and sustainable development.

In a recorded statement, UNESCO expressed concern regarding the deteriorating global environment for journalists and media professionals. The organisation reported a 10 per cent global decline in press freedom since 2012 and noted a 60 per cent increase in self-censorship among journalists. UNESCO warned that these trends reflect a broader shrinking of civic space

both online and offline and emphasised the importance of protecting independent journalism, media freedom, and access to reliable information.

United Nations representatives further underscored the need for international cooperation in addressing the human rights implications of emerging technologies. They stressed that digital governance frameworks should promote transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination while ensuring that technological advancements contribute to human dignity and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

Statements by Civil Society Organisations

Civil society organisations welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur and echoed concerns regarding the growing impact of digital surveillance, information manipulation, and restrictions on freedom of expression in online spaces. Many speakers warned that emerging technologies are increasingly being used to monitor, intimidate, and silence journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and other individuals exercising their fundamental rights.

Several organisations expressed concern regarding the concentration of power among both State authorities and major technology companies, highlighting the risks posed by opaque content moderation systems, algorithmic decision-making, and the misuse of artificial intelligence technologies. Speakers stressed that insufficient transparency and accountability in digital governance can undermine public trust, democratic participation, and access to information.

Civil society representatives also emphasised the importance of protecting journalists and independent media operating in increasingly challenging environments, particularly in situations of conflict and political instability. Many interventions called for stronger safeguards against unlawful surveillance, arbitrary censorship, online harassment, and other measures that restrict civic space and legitimate public discourse.

Many organisations supported the Special Rapporteur's call for human rights-centred approaches to digital governance and urged States to ensure that efforts to address disinformation and harmful online content remain fully consistent with international human rights law.

Concluding Remarks by the Special Rapporteur

In her concluding remarks, Ms Khan thanked participating delegations, United Nations entities, and civil society organisations for their contributions to the dialogue. She welcomed the broad

recognition of the challenges posed by artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, and the concentration of power within digital ecosystems.

The Special Rapporteur reiterated that freedom of expression remains a foundational human right and an essential safeguard for democratic participation, accountability, and access to information. She stressed that technological innovation must not come at the expense of fundamental freedoms and warned against approaches that prioritise control, surveillance, or commercial interests over human rights protections.

Ms Khan further emphasised that governments, technology companies, and international organisations share responsibility for ensuring that digital technologies are developed and deployed in ways that respect human dignity and international human rights law. She reiterated the need for greater transparency, independent oversight, and accountability mechanisms in the governance of artificial intelligence and digital platforms.

Concluding the dialogue, Ms Khan called for continued international cooperation and renewed commitment to protecting freedom of expression in the digital age, stressing that human rights must remain at the centre of all efforts to govern emerging technologies.

Conclusion

The Interactive Dialogue demonstrated the growing international concern regarding the impact of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on freedom of opinion and expression. Participants broadly agreed that while technological innovation has created unprecedented opportunities for communication, participation, and access to information, it has also introduced significant challenges related to surveillance, disinformation, censorship, and the concentration of power within digital ecosystems.

Throughout the discussion, delegations emphasised the importance of ensuring that the governance of emerging technologies remains firmly grounded in international human rights law. Particular attention was given to the need for transparency, accountability, and effective oversight mechanisms capable of addressing the risks associated with artificial intelligence and digital platforms.

The dialogue reflected differing approaches among delegations regarding the governance of digital technologies. While many delegations emphasised individual freedoms, transparency, and

protection against surveillance, others highlighted national security concerns, social cohesion, and the regulation of harmful content. Despite these differences, participants broadly agreed that freedom of expression remains essential to democratic participation, accountability, and access to information in an increasingly digital world.

The discussions underscored the urgent need for coordinated international action to ensure that technological development advances human rights and democratic participation rather than undermining them.

GICJ Position

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) is particularly concerned by the growing use of digital technologies to restrict freedom of expression, monitor individuals, and limit civic participation. GICJ is especially alarmed by the increasing concentration of informational power among both State authorities and private technology companies, which risks undermining transparency, accountability, democratic governance, and the free exchange of ideas.

GICJ stresses the urgent need for States to ensure that all digital governance frameworks comply fully with international human rights law, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Regulatory measures addressing artificial intelligence and digital technologies must be transparent, proportionate, and developed through inclusive processes that involve civil society, independent experts, and affected communities.

GICJ further calls upon States to strengthen legal protections for journalists, human rights defenders, whistleblowers, and civil society actors operating in digital environments. Governments should adopt robust safeguards against unlawful surveillance, arbitrary censorship, and the misuse of emerging technologies for political repression or discrimination.

Finally, GICJ urges the international community to prioritise human rights-centred approaches to technological governance. Innovation should serve the public interest and contribute to human dignity, equality, and freedom. Artificial intelligence and digital technologies must remain tools that empower individuals and strengthen democratic participation rather than mechanisms that restrict rights or concentrate power.



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