

IGF 2017: Geneva, Switzerland, 18-21 December

Convention Report

The 12th annual meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) took place at the United Nations Office in Geneva between 18 and 21 December 2017. The guiding motto was “Shape Your Digital Future!”

As a first-time participant, the size of the convention was simply overwhelming. More than 2000 delegates from over 142 countries attended the IGF on site. Hosted at the Palais de Nations and organised along six main sessions, the number of meetings one could attend was incredible. With my own research situated between the fields of computer science, law, and international relations, the IGF presented an invaluable platform for engaging with and learning from leading scholars and policy makers. Attending sessions hosted by eminent academics and practitioners allowed me to reflect on and reconsider my own work.

Fascinated by the diversity of presentations, I decided to focus my attention on sessions revolving around cybersecurity norms. There were a great many sessions looking at the work of the Global Commission on the Stability of Cyberspace, and Microsoft’s call for a Digital Geneva Convention. Despite the apparent need for commonly shared standards of appropriate behaviour in cyberspace, the discussions at the IGF made obvious the lack of agreement and divergence of understanding relating to cybersecurity norms. Although it was acknowledged that cybersecurity presents many new challenges and warrants innovative thinking, earlier norms regimes, such as the Chemical and Biological Weapons regime, or the Financial Action Task Force, may hold very important lessons. The latter show considerable variation in terms of structure, actor base, and founding mechanisms, and imply that one-size-fits-all solutions for cybersecurity will not work. Rather, what seems to be required is nuance and focus, as well as a symbiosis of old and new.

Given the broad scope of issues involved, the great number of stakeholders engaged, and the rapid pace of technological development, cybersecurity norm processes need to be pursued with clear thematic focal points. Issue specificity may be the key to success with regard to ensuring progress on cybersecurity norm development. Another important factor of success in terms of increasing the stability of cyberspace is the genuine involvement of non-state actors in interstate processes. Here, the forum’s role and mission to foster a common understanding among different stakeholders, and to provide a platform for critical engagement and debate is indispensable and needs to be further extended. True inclusivity and collaborative exchange should be at the heart of future meetings.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Amazon and the European Summer School on In-

ternet Governance for admitting me to the policy fellowship. Without the generous support of these two entities, participation at the IGF would not have been possible. Given the forum's policy relevance and value, I hope to be attending consecutive IGF meetings in the near future.