

It is just about rights

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)¹ conducted a meeting from 1-9 June 2014 at Barcelona, Spain. Hosted by APC member Pangea at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (BarcelonaTech UPC), it was the 12th face-to-face APC member meeting, since it was founded in 1990. This meeting was not only for APC board members or staff, but also its organizational members; and individual affiliates who are strengthening the network and bringing collaborative efforts within their community.

About 100 people from across the world representing different cultures and traditions came forward and talked about various issues and challenges that they face. The programme covered a wide range of topics –internet rights; community networks; access & infrastructural issues; network security issues; human rights; issues around women and their violations; data protection; cyber-laws; and free and open source resources and tools.

On June 1st 2014, the programme started with sharing sessions on ‘Internet rights are human rights²’. The training modules aimed at building an understanding of the relationship between human rights, ICTs and the internet. These modules intended to help advocates and actors who work on human rights and internet/ICTs and others with an interest in the issues. Participants worked together in small groups and learnt about the international human rights regime using different case-studies. The sharing session continued on 2nd and 3rd June, 2014 and discussions around the impact of the internet on human rights were continued. They also analyzed the theoretical and practical implications related to the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and privacy.

Every year, new members join APC and since its last member meeting in Manila, Philippines, 22 new organizational and individual members joined in. This was a perfect time to meet face-to-face with new member colleagues and learn about their work and the teams they lead in their countries. APC specially welcomed all new members and also gave orientation for the upcoming plans.

Initial three days of the programme charged the participants so much that it was a perfect time to talk about technologies, resources and looked at human rights issues through the lens of technology. A TakeBack TheNet (TBTN)³ event was also conducted where human rights advocated and transformative technology providers discussed what civil society organizations and individuals can do to work together and to restore trust in communication infrastructure. TBTN was organized on 4-5 June 2014, which also marked the anniversary of the revelations by Edward Snowden who exposed an unprecedented level of mass surveillance of internet users.

¹ <http://www.apc.org/en/home>

² Internet rights are human rights Training Modules <http://itrainonline.org/itrainonline/mmtk/irhr.shtml>

³ <https://www.takebackthetech.net/>

The event was trying to bring some answers around how civil society organizations and technologists can work to advocate for internet and human rights issues together. The part of the answer to this problem is that civil society organizations and tech activists to take measures together and into their own hands by adopting tools and technologies that are free and open source; sustainable and cost-effective.

The event concluded with award ceremony celebrating the two winners of the global APC Chris Nicol FLOSS Prize 2014. The award recognized people who are using free/libre and open source software (FLOSS). The idea behind this award was to honour Chris Nicol, a longtime FLOSS advocate and activist who for many years worked with APC and its Barcelona-based member organisation Pangea.

Network LaLoLib, an initiative of Colombia won the award for solving the problem of connectivity for the inhabitants of La Vereda La Loma by constructing the local mesh network. The network used all forms of free and open source software from the network nodes to the servers and content.

After learning, sharing and debating on so many topics together, it was time for members to share their skills amongst other member colleagues and learn from their skills. Using open space methodology, APC's Share and Remix Session was organized on 6th June, 2014. Network members updated each other on the work they were doing, proposed joint campaigns and planned for new collaborations. This was a space for stories, films, posters, songs and poetry as well as a place for hands-on sessions on open source tools and other tips and tricks or for brainstorming about fundraising strategies. Participants created their own agenda for the day with what they brought to the sessions and the topics they proposed for discussion.

For six days there was intensive discussion, debating, sharing and learning from fellow members. This was collective collaborative effort to understand issues around internet and human rights. Across the globe, whether in India, Latin America, Malaysia, South Korea or Africa, issues are same - freedom of expression, data protection, cyber surveillance, violence against women or human rights. Difference is just that we all have adopted different methodology to address these issues. It is time to join hands and make a collaborative effort to address these issues instead of working in isolation.