

# Preface

---

My engagement with internet politics and activism started in the mid-1990s. In 1995 Denmark had launched its first Ministry for Research and Information Technology, and I was fortunate to join a group of enthusiastic people working on the first Danish ‘information society’ strategy. At that time people in the ministry were still debating whether the internet was a passing phenomenon, thus whether it made sense to strategize on its societal implications. In the report that laid the framework for the information society policy, the Dybkjær–Christensen report from 1994, the internet is not mentioned once. In the following years, however, policy issues related to the internet continued to emerge, including issues such as privacy and security, digital signatures, electronic commerce, design and accessibility, digital divides, use of computers in primary schools, digital libraries, use of electronic health records, online public services, and so forth.

In 2000 human rights issues related to the internet had started to surface in Danish debate, and some friends and I founded Digital Rights, a small grass-roots organization concerned with human rights protection on the internet. Over the next ten years Digital Rights engaged in advocacy related to, among other things, workplace surveillance, anti-terrorism legislation, data retention, internet filters at public libraries, and self-regulation by internet service providers. In the beginning this was mainly at national level, but in 2002 we took part in the formation of European Digital Rights (EDRI), which has now grown into a 30-plus network of organizations from across Europe involved in internet-related standard-setting and advocacy from a human rights perspective.

Parallel to this work at grass-roots level, I started to work for the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) in 2001. The institute was well renowned in the human rights community, but with limited focus on information and communication technology (ICT) issues. In 2002, however, the first United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was announced, and with this both DIHR’s and my own involvement in the international ICT policy field took off. WSIS comprised two summits. The first was held in Geneva in December 2003 and the second in Tunis in November 2005, with numerous preparatory meetings in between. The WSIS process brought together a variety of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, companies, and state representatives to negotiate

and adopt a 'Declaration of Principles' and 'Plan of Action' for the information society. The summit was the first attempt by the United Nations to address the linkage between development and global communication policy, with resolution 56/183 as the formal mandate (United Nations General Assembly 31 January 2002).

In the WSIS process it was frequently stressed that ICT, and in particular the internet, holds great potential for advancing human rights, not least in the developing world. One of the political commitments that emerged from WSIS was that governments agreed on promoting this potential, and declared human rights the baseline for ICT policy (World Summit on the Information Society 2003). Furthermore, it was stressed that civil society should play a key role in the development of the information society. The WSIS negotiations gave rise to several controversies related to the development of the information society, especially concerning US control over the internet, financing digital divides, and promoting and protecting human rights online (Drake and Jørgensen 2006: 36). The summit was also controversial with regard to civil society participation. While civil society was formally included in the process, participation was de facto restricted by lack of the financial means that participation required, resulting in a geographic and gender-based imbalance. Also, since civil society had no voting rights, its role was limited to that of observer with the right to submit written contributions and with some restricted speaking rights.<sup>1</sup>

During the WSIS process I carried out two different roles: one as human rights adviser to the Danish governmental delegation, the second as co-coordinator of civil society's Human Rights Caucus together with Meryem Marzouki, head of the French NGO 'Imaginons un Réseau Internet Solidaire' (IRIS). The Danish government, together with Germany and a few other countries, had included representation from civil society or national human rights institutions in their delegation, which provided a unique opportunity for more informal discussions on controversial issues with government officials.

Two issues were of particular importance to the Human Rights Caucus during the process: first, to have states endorse a commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the WSIS Declaration of Principles, and second, to apply human rights standards as the baseline in specific policy areas. Some of the contentious policy issues included, in no particular order, privatized law enforcement, content regulation, online censorship, imprisonment of internet journalists, privacy and data

---

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of civil society participation in the WSIS process see Servaes et al. (2006) and Dutton and Peltu (2010).

protection, cyber security, file sharing, access to knowledge, and intellectual property rights.<sup>2</sup>

While participating in these policy debates, both at national and international level, I frequently noticed how various actors frame the internet differently when approaching it as a subject for policy making. Some address it as a new, though different, medium and refer to media law when debating regulation of the internet. Others approach it primarily as a global infrastructure that needs to be secured and maintained. Some approach it as a public sphere to which everyone should have access, while others emphasize the specific social norms and values that exist online. The different framings typically relate to different aspects of internet use, as well as competing and often vaguely defined claims related to the internet as a public and private realm. Inspired by this experience, I set out to examine how various framings of the internet shape specific human rights issues. The analysis is carried out in the broad context of the way human rights are translated and applied in the internet era in academic literature, in the international community's policy discourse, and at local level.

The book is based on my PhD dissertation, which I conducted at the Institute for Communication, Business and ICT at Roskilde University and as a PhD fellow at the Danish Institute for Human Right. It is, however, substantively revised, taking into account developments that have occurred since I defended the thesis in January 2012.

I am grateful for all the brilliant and engaged people from all over the world I have met throughout my work in this field, many of whom have become friends. While it is impossible to name everyone, I want to mention Meryem Marzouki, Karen Banks, Anriette Esterhuysen, Dorothy Okello, Sharon Hom, Diana Bronson, Deborah Hurley, Marc Rotenberg, Stephanie Perrin, Jane Johnsen, Ralf Bendrath, Markus Bechedahl, Heike Jensen, Jeanette Hofmann, Frédéric Dubois, Michel Lambert, Gus Hosein, David Banisar, Simon Davis, Ian Brown, Joris von Hoboken, Sjoera Nas, Andreas Krisch, Urs Gasser, Fernando Bermejo, Ryan O'Toole, Tanja Krabbe, Tomas Kønigsfeldt, Per Helge Sørensen, Anders Kjærulff, Birgitte Kofod Olsen, Wolfgang Benedek, Matthias Ketterman, Lee Hibbard, Lisa Horner, Dixie Hawtin, Milton Müller, Wolfgang Kleinwachter, William Drake, Avri Dora, Tomas Tufte, and Jens Hoff. A special note of thanks goes to the people from Uganda and Wikipedia who agreed to participate in my case studies and provided valuable insights. I also wish to thank my

---

<sup>2</sup> *Human Rights in the Global Information Society* (Jørgensen 2006) was created on the back of WSIS. Each chapter addresses the challenges and opportunities a particular human right faces in the internet era.

dear colleagues and friends at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, who have provided an inspiring and fun working base for the past 12 years.

A heartfelt thanks goes to my family and friends who have supported me each in their own way, and especially to my parents who continue to provide me with invaluable support.

I dedicate this book to my sons Oscar and Anton, with love and gratitude.