



مجموعة سلامة الفكرية للسياسات والأعمال

SALAMA Policy & Business Intellectual Group

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# Architecting the Global Digital Future

The UN WSIS+20 Landmark Outcomes

December 2025



UNITED NATIONS  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The High-Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on December 16–17, 2025, will be remembered as the moment the world transitioned from the "Era of Connectivity" to the "Era of Digital Sovereignty and Accountability".

The WSIS+20 High-Level Meeting represents a structural re-engineering of global digital governance, not a routine review of past commitments.

Twenty years after the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the international community has formally moved beyond treating digitalization as a sectoral policy domain.

We are now architecting a holistic governance framework that integrates Artificial Intelligence, environmental stewardship, and the fundamental protection of human rights into the very fabric of the global administrative architecture.

The WSIS+20 Outcome Document transitions the global focus from mere connectivity to meaningful digital inclusion, artificial intelligence (AI) safeguards, and environmental sustainability.

It marks three irreversible shifts: from access to agency, from innovation to accountability, and from voluntary coordination to institutional permanence.

## 1. Historical Evolution: Institutionalization of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

The WSIS process has evolved from a visionary roadmap into a permanent administrative framework for the global Internet. This institutional shift secures the IGF as the primary global platform for dialogue, ensuring that digital governance remains inclusive, open, and global in nature.

- **The Foundations:** The process began with the **2003 Geneva Declaration** and the **2005 Tunis Agenda**, establishing the multi-stakeholder model where governments, the private sector, and civil society collaborate.
- **A Landmark Decision:** The 2025 review officially designates the **Internet Governance Forum (IGF)** as a **permanent forum of the United Nations**.
- **Institutional Stability:** This move ensures stable and sustainable funding within the UN budget and a permanent secretariat hosted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

The permanence of the IGF does more than stabilize funding or secretariat functions. It **rebalances the architecture of digital power**.

By embedding multistakeholder dialogue permanently within the UN system, the WSIS+20 decision constrains unilateral digital sovereignty approaches while legitimizing **distributed governance**. A long-term commitment to the **multistakeholder model** through the effective participation and partnership of: Governments, Private Sector, Civil Society, Technical and Academic Communities.

This is a quiet but profound shift: **digital governance has crossed the threshold from experimental diplomacy to permanent global administration**.

## 2. Strategic AI Governance: The 2026 Global Dialogue on AI Governance

For the first time in a WSIS outcome, AI and emerging technologies are positioned as both major opportunities and systemic risks.

AI has moved to the center of the WSIS framework, with 2026 serving as the inaugural year for a new global governance cycle. AI has emerged as the defining inequality amplifier of the digital age. Unlike the Internet era, where access was the primary fault line, the AI era is structured around **compute concentration, proprietary data asymmetries, and talent localization**.

- **The Global Dialogue:** Established as a recurring platform, the **Global Dialogue on AI Governance** will involve governments and all stakeholders to align international policy.
- **Capacity-Building Fellowship:** To bridge the "AI divide," an **AI capacity-building fellowship** for government officials will be launched to map system-wide initiatives and identify gaps in developing nations.
- **Scientific Oversight:** The UN has initiated a multidisciplinary **Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence** to conduct evidence-based risk and opportunity assessments.
- **Open Resources:** There is a new mandate to increase access to **open AI models**, training data, and high-performance computing to prevent technological monopolies.

### 3. Social Media and Digital Content Policy

The 2025 resolution sets rigorous expectations for digital platforms, moving beyond "safe harbor" concepts toward active responsibility.

The WSIS+20 framework does not mandate censorship, nor does it endorse platform overreach. Instead, it establishes a **rights-anchored duty of care**, where platforms are neither passive conduits nor unaccountable arbiters, but governed actors within the international system.

- **Platform Accountability:** Business enterprises, including social media companies, are explicitly called upon to respect human rights in line with the **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights**.
- **Information Integrity:** The document demands strengthened international cooperation to address **misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech** while protecting the integrity of democratic processes.
- **Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups:** A priority is placed on legal and policy frameworks to protect children in the digital space and to counter **sexual and gender-based violence** amplified by technology.
- **Human Rights Online:** Reaffirming that the same rights held offline must be protected online, specifically calling for an end to **Internet shutdowns** and arbitrary surveillance.

## 4. Environmental and Sustainable Digitalization

For the first time, the "**Green Digital**" agenda is codified as a core priority. Explicitly cites the high energy and water consumption of **data centers** and **AI**, alongside the growing crisis of **e-waste**. This urges the development of international standards for "sustainable digital products" and circular economy approaches.

In the coming decade, AI systems that cannot demonstrate energy efficiency, water stewardship, and lifecycle responsibility will face not only regulatory resistance, but social rejection. **Sustainability is no longer adjacent to digital growth, it is its precondition.**

- **Resource Consumption:** The UN expresses deep concern regarding the **energy and water consumption** of data centers and the rapid growth of AI.
- **Circular Economy:** Stakeholders are urged to develop international standards for the **reuse, repair, and recycling** of digital products to manage the growing volume of electronic waste.
- **Responsible Sourcing:** The document highlights the need for sustainable use of **critical mineral resources** required for digital equipment.

## 5. Analysis of Strategic Implications

The 2025 WSIS+20 review codifies a "**New Deal**" for the digital age: The transition of the IGF to a permanent body funded home within the UN and the launch of the Global AI Dialogue signal that digital governance is no longer an "emerging issue" but a permanent pillar of international law and sustainable development.

### 1. Synergy vs. Fragmentation

The WSIS+20 outcomes repeatedly stresses "coherence" between the WSIS action lines and the newer Global Digital Compact.

- **The "Road Map":** A joint implementation road map is due by 2026 to ensure the UN system doesn't duplicate efforts. For tech firms, this means a more unified global regulatory signal rather than competing UN frameworks.

### 2. Human Rights in the Digital Age

The resolution reaffirms that the **same rights people have offline must be protected online**.

- **Impact on Surveillance:** It explicitly calls for surveillance technologies to be used only in accordance with international human rights law (legality, necessity, and proportionality).
- **Corporate Accountability:** Calls on the private sector to apply the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights throughout their technology's life cycle.

### 3. Geopolitical Shifts in Data Governance

The document recognizes the need for "equitable and interoperable data governance".

- **Trend:** There is a clear move toward supporting **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** and **Digital Public Goods (DPGs)**—such as open-source software and open AI models—as a way for developing countries to avoid "market power concentrations".

## 6. What happens next - Governance architecture and timelines

The outcome document sets a multi-year cadence that matters for strategy:

- **2026:** UNGIS to prepare a **joint implementation road map** to strengthen coherence between WSIS and the GDC; presented to CSTD (29th session, 2026).
- **2026:** inaugural **Global Dialogue on AI Governance** (on margins of existing UN conferences/meetings).
- **2027:**
  - ITU internal task force reports on digital development financing recommendations;
  - action line facilitators develop targeted implementation road maps with targets/metrics and report to CSTD (30th session, 2027);
  - systematic review of ICT indicators/methodologies to be reported to CSTD (30th session, 2027);
  - GA high-level meeting to review progress on GDC during its 82nd session (2027).
- **2030:** WSIS+20 outcomes submitted as input to the 2030 Agenda review.
- **2035:** GA to hold high-level meeting on overall review of WSIS outcomes.

The next 24 months represent the "Operational Window" where the default settings of the global digital future will be shaped. This window will define the operating system of global digital governance for the next decades. Metrics, funding pathways, and institutional mandates agreed during this period will become default standards, difficult to reverse and costly to ignore.

## GEORGE SALAMA

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Senior technology strategist and executive advisor operating at the intersection of tech industrial innovation, public policy, and sovereign digital strategy. As Executive President of SALAMA Group, Co-Founder of the AI Universal Council and Senior Advisor to the Blue Owl Group in Washington DC, George leads a portfolio of initiatives focused on responsible AI adoption, regulatory intelligence, and digital transformation across emerging markets. He is regularly engaged by governments, multilateral institutions, and global technology firms on AI governance design, digital diplomacy, and sovereign technology strategy.

Previously, George served as the Regional Director of Public Policy for X (formerly Twitter) in MENA, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran from 2016 to 2022. As a founding member of the platform's regional leadership, he navigated complex geopolitical landscapes to establish Twitter's institutional presence in the Middle East. George led high-stakes engagement with governments, regulators, and civil society, shaping frameworks for platform safety, digital rights, and crisis response. He also served as an official spokesperson and architect of the region's "Twitter for Good" social impact initiatives.

Earlier, George led public policy at the SAMENA Telecommunications Council and focused on Internet governance at Egypt's National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA). His career spans regulatory bodies and global tech giants, offering deep expertise in digital diplomacy.

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# Shaping The Future



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