

16 August 2021

**26th Session of the Advisory Committee
Maat for Peace on New and Emerging Digital Technologies
and Human Rights**

Mr./Madame President

Maat for Peace welcomes this session and would like to make the following intervention in regard to the multifaceted nature of new digital technologies and its implications on Human Rights. New technologies, including AI, social media, and big data technologies have indeed promoted and preserved human rights in several ways. Citizens across the globe now realize their rights and liberties due to their exposure to extensive information. The Internet also acts as an inclusive platform that benefits everyone, including marginalized groups such as women, children, persons with disabilities, and refugees. It eases their access to education, welfare systems, public services, social security, and their participation in political processes. New technologies have also paved the way for the public to express their opinions freely and secured a digital space for civil societies to empower minority groups and network safely. During the Covid 19 pandemic, digital technology has also played a role in linking between physical isolation and economic and social activity.

Our world and lives are changing at an unprecedented rate and scale as a result of the growing power of digital technology. While having many beneficial impacts on human rights, digital technology also possesses negative connotations that poses a threat on human rights, peace, and security. States, governments, and companies utilize advanced artificial intelligence and big data technologies to facilitate state surveillance, store information, and replace human judgment with algorithmic decision-making. These technologies undermine the right to privacy, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and the right to non-discrimination to a number of social and economic rights, such as the right to health, work, and social security. The rise of biometric surveillance, particularly facial recognition, results in unlawful discrimination based solely on a person's face features and their identification according to ethnicity, race, national origin, gender, and other criteria. Some countries equip an immense security camera network in public spaces to capture individuals' faces, track them, and monitor their physiological or behavioral characteristics. This leads to biased judgement and an unfair distribution of public services, social security, healthcare, education, financial transactions, and immigration. It also results in restrictions on movement, repressing civil society organizations, targeting peaceful protestors, and combating oppositions and critical media. Among the undermined freedoms are freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly. Some states misuse technology and instigate internet shutdowns as means to control peaceful protests, suppress political opposition, and silent dissent. This also allows governments to keep the international community in the shadows as to what is really going on within the country. This was shown in the case of Palestine, in which there was a violation of their digital rights during an internet shutdown this year. Internet shutdowns hamper people's ability to obtain critical services, obtain education and/or employment, do business, and communicate with their relatives, which touches on a variety of other social, economic, and cultural rights.

Our stance is that as much as new digital technology has facilitated lives, helped the poor, lead to great exposure to information and eased communications across the globe, it paved the way for severe human rights violations and restrictions. As such, we recommend that (1) A legal framework that complies with human rights safeguards be set for states that purchase, export, and use surveillance technologies. (2) The process of datafication should be looked at from a holistic approach, in which the entire cycle complies with human rights laws. To do so, it is crucial to integrate tech experts with human rights experts and call for a collaboration between them in order to fully comprehend the consequences of technology's development on human rights. This collaboration would allow both experts to consider human rights from the beginning of the cycle, starting from the design, deployment, and implementation. (3) States that purchase, export, and use surveillance technologies should join the Wassenaar Arrangement and comply with its norms and standards, which should be compatible with international human rights legislation. (4) Non-discriminating features should be embodied and included in the establishment of AI codes and facial recognition systems to avoid biases based on ethnicity, race, and place of origin. (5) A clear, comprehensive, and binding legal instrument should be established to hold states accountable in the case of internet shut down.

Thank you. Mr./Madme President