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Internet Society Background Paper on ITU Plenipotentiary 2026

A general overview of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference and perspectives on the main Internet-related issues that may be discussed

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Executive Summary

The International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Plenipotentiary Conference 2026 (PP-26), to be held 9–27 November in Doha, Qatar, arrives at a critical juncture for the Internet.

It is the first Plenipotentiary since the UN General Assembly (UNGA) reaffirmed ¹the multistakeholder model of Internet governance through the WSIS+20 review and established the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)² as a permanent body. A central question at PP-26 will be whether ITU resolutions reflect that reaffirmation or are used to expand ITU's authority in Internet governance, Internet standards development, and network architecture decisions that already function well within the existing multistakeholder ecosystem. This paper outlines the key issues at stake and the Internet Society's priorities.

Held every four years, the Plenipotentiary is the key event where ITU Member States decide on the future role of the organization (e.g., strategic and financial plan, leadership, topics for study), thereby determining the organization's scope to influence and affect the development of telecommunication/information and communication technologies (ICTs) worldwide.

For the Internet Society, it is key to ensure that PP-26 upholds the existing multistakeholder model of Internet governance, where governments, the technical community, civil society, academia, and the private sector all contribute according to their expertise, rather than expanding the ITU's mandate into areas currently managed by multistakeholder organizations in the ecosystem. The model is what has enabled the Internet to thrive.

We are actively challenging proposals that could affect the Internet's underlying technical architecture or increase fragmentation, as well as those that could affect connectivity, particularly for remote, underserved, and unserved communities. Considering the rapid pace of development in artificial intelligence, space technologies, and related fields, the urgency of bridging the widening divide is real: connecting the 2.2 billion people who remain offline—many of whom are girls, women, Indigenous communities, and refugees—and promoting online safety should be a priority.

The Internet Society calls on its members, chapters, and the broader technical community to engage with us ahead of PP-26. We encourage chapters to connect with their national delegations and share this paper with their Ministry of ICT or equivalent. Technical community members can help by analyzing

¹ For more information on the significance of WSIS+20 to Internet governance, read our blog post:

<https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2025/12/why-the-uns-next-decision-on-internet-governance-matters-for-everyone/>

² A joint report by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the Internet Society (ISOC) examined the global impact of the IGF. It demonstrates how coordination—rather than control—has driven tangible progress in the Internet's resilience, reach, and trust. Read the report: <https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/doc/2025/footprints-of-20-years-of-the-internet-governance-forum/>

the risks of proposals that could affect the Internet and open standards. Follow updates on our [PP-26 page](#) and reach out at internetgovernance@isoc.org.

Internet Society's Objectives at PP-26

The Internet Society will participate at PP-26 as a Sector Member of ITU-T and ITU-D, bringing technical expertise, a global community of chapters and members, and a longstanding commitment to an open, globally connected, secure, and trustworthy Internet. Our objectives at PP-26 reflect that commitment.

As a Sector Member³, we actively engage Member States in discussions that concern the Internet's technical, social, and economic development.

Our priorities include:

Offering technical expertise: A successful outcome would ensure that PP-26 decisions support the Internet's fundamental properties—global interoperability, open and voluntary standards, decentralized architecture, and the freedom to innovate. Outcomes that fragment the Internet, centralize control over its architecture, or introduce new intergovernmental authority over functions already well served by open, multistakeholder processes would run counter to these goals.

Upholding the multistakeholder model: We will actively engage Member States to ensure that PP-26 resolutions genuinely reflect the WSIS+20 reaffirmation of the multistakeholder model⁴, preserving and strengthening the role of the technical community, civil society, and the private sector in Internet governance.

Connecting unconnected communities: A successful outcome would produce resolutions and policies that expand affordable, meaningful connectivity—particularly for the least developed countries, small island developing states, and landlocked developing countries—addressing the full range of barriers to connectivity, from infrastructure to adoption, driven by factors such as affordability, digital literacy, and relevant local content.

Involving the Internet Society community: The Internet Society has deep technical expertise and a global network of chapters, members, and partners. We bring data, analysis, and on-the-ground experience from its global network of chapters, members, and partners, and will work to ensure that

³ Sector Members have a limited role at the conference, attending as observers. They do not have voting rights, generally do not chair meetings, and have limited speaking opportunities during main meetings, but can participate in ad hoc meetings and meet with delegations on topics under discussion.

⁴ For more information, read our Non-Paper on WSIS+20 Implementation: <https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/doc/2026/non-paper-on-wsis20-implementation/>

this expertise reaches delegations and contributes to well-informed discussions on complex technical questions.

After PP-26, the Internet Society will continue to monitor the implementation of adopted resolutions and engage in ITU sector work through the 2026–2030 study period. We will share our analysis with the broader Internet community and work closely with partners to advance outcomes that keep the Internet open, connected, and trustworthy for everyone.

Background of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference

The ITU is an inter-governmental, treaty-based UN specialized agency headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, working across three sectors: Radiocommunication (ITU-R), Telecommunication Standardization (ITU-T), and Telecommunication Development (ITU-D)—supported by the General Secretariat.

The Plenipotentiary is the main decision-making body of the ITU that provides overall strategic and financial guidance for the ITU from an administrative, budgetary, and operational perspective. The Plenipotentiary is also where the two treaties (Constitution and Convention) governing the ITU can be modified, though there are no changes anticipated in 2026.

Held every four years, the Plenipotentiary adopts the ITU's four-year strategic and financial plans, elects the ITU leadership (Secretary-General and Directors of the three sectors), the Member States that serve on the ITU Council, and the individuals to serve on the Radio Regulations Board (RRB), and revises or approves Resolutions and Decisions that guide the work of the ITU.

The Plenipotentiary is an intergovernmental conference: decisions are made by Member States, while other entities from the technical community, private sector, civil society, academia, and non-governmental organizations participate as observers without a vote. Contributions for consideration come primarily through Common Regional Proposals developed by the Regional Telecommunication Organizations (RTOs) and from Member States directly. For PP-26, the deadline for contributions is 19 October 2026⁵.

PP-26 Context

The ITU's mandate was originally focused on international telecommunications. The scope of its activities is specifically stated in [Article 1 of the ITU Constitution](#). However, since Plenipotentiary 1998, the ITU has expanded its work to include Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and increased work on Internet-related studies. There is ongoing debate among Member States over the

⁵ Late proposals can be accepted for consideration by the Plenipotentiary plenary.

appropriate role of the ITU in the Internet (including Internet governance), with some countries advocating for greater involvement.

PP-26 will consider updates to its Internet-related resolutions as well as topics discussed at ITU sector conferences since the last Plenipotentiary (WRC-23, WTSA-24, and WTDC-25⁶). In addition, proposals to the Plenipotentiary will take into consideration UN activities, as well as global developments, that could affect the ITU and the Internet since PP-22, such as:

- The outcomes of the UNGA's 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society held in 2025 (see UNGA A/RES/80/173), including the establishment of the Internet Governance Forum as a permanent forum under UNDESA (A/RES/78/265).
- The accelerated growth of the use of Artificial Intelligence as well as the UN Resolution on AI (A/RES/78/265) "Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development", and the establishment of the "Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence Governance" and the "Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence" (A/RES/79/325);
- The UN's new Global Mechanism on Cybersecurity (e.g., UNGA A/80/257);
- The Pact for the Future/Global Digital Compact⁷;
- The establishment of the United Nations Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET)⁸;
- The UN Secretary General's Digital Cooperation roadmap⁹;
- The increased deployment of mega-constellations, especially in non-geosynchronous orbits (NGSO);
- The increased awareness of the importance of the resilience of undersea cables supporting the Internet and global communications.

The World Telecommunication Policy Forum 2026¹⁰ (WTPF-26) will be held in September and could foreshadow discussions at PP-26. WTPF-26 will focus on the following thematic areas:

- Bridging digital divides
- Green digital transformation
- Resilience of telecommunication and ICT systems
- Space connectivity
- ICT-centric innovation ecosystems

⁶ WRC-23, WTSA-24, and WTDC-25 refer to the World Radiocommunication Conference 2023, the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly 2024, and the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2025, respectively.

⁷ https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf

⁸ <https://www.un.org/digital-emerging-technologies/>

⁹ <https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/>

¹⁰ <https://wtpf.itu.int/2026/>

In addition, it is expected that proposals encouraging stronger participation of industry members will be discussed.

Priority Topics

The Internet Society will actively advocate for outcomes that advance the open, globally connected, secure, and trustworthy Internet, including in the following areas:

Issue Area	Description
Connectivity and the digital divide	The Internet Society supports outcomes that enable universal, meaningful access, in particular approaches that empower local communities, such as community-centered connectivity. We favor approaches that address not only the lack of infrastructure, but also the need for affordability, digital literacy, and local content. A new Internet Society-ITU report¹¹ takes a close look at how community-centered connectivity efforts are helping connect people living beyond the geographic or business reach of traditional last-mile connectivity models. We also pay attention to the governance of non-geosynchronous satellite orbit (NGSO) systems including low-earth-orbiting (LEO) satellite constellations, submarine cable resilience, and spectrum policy—where the appropriate regulatory venue and framework remain contested among member states.
ITU mandate	The Internet Society supports proposals that reinforce the existing multistakeholder model of Internet governance, where governments, the technical community, civil society, academia, and the private sector all contribute according to their expertise, rather than expanding the ITU’s mandate into areas overlapping existing multistakeholder mechanisms, such as open Internet standards, DNS administration, or other multistakeholder Internet governance processes.

¹¹ From Telecentres, Community Networks To Sustainable Smart Villages and Smart Islands. Access at: <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/meetings/rdf/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2026/07/From-telecentres-community-networks-case-studies-2400898E.pdf>

Alternative network models	The Internet Society supports proposals that maintain the open, global, secure, and trustworthy nature of the Internet, as opposed to those that risk fragmenting global interoperability and centralizing control over routing and addressing in the ITU. Internet protocols are best developed in the IETF and other standards bodies, where the development process is open to all participants, proceeds by consensus, and produces protocols that anyone can freely read, implement, and build upon—no membership or fees required—and that are voluntarily adopted.
Cost-sharing frameworks	The Internet Society advocates against proposals on government-mandated Internet traffic-routing and cost-sharing (e.g., "sender-pays") as such proposals would likely fragment the Internet's interconnection model, raise costs for smaller operators, and harm users in developing countries. The Internet Society supports voluntary agreements between providers concerning international interconnections and creating an enabling environment by adopting policies that promote and facilitate network interconnection. ¹²
Multistakeholder model integrity	The Internet Society supports outcomes that reflect the WSIS+20 reaffirmation of the multistakeholder model, including avoiding any expansion of CWG-Internet's role that would shift Internet public policy decisions toward an intergovernmental-only process.
Emerging technologies	The Internet Society supports ITU studies on AI and quantum technologies that are scoped to ITU's technical remit and coordinated with, rather than duplicative of, work already underway in other standards bodies and UN processes. ¹³
International Telecommunication Regulations	The Internet Society opposes proposals to convene a new World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT), potentially reopening the 2012 ITR debate on Internet-related provisions. A new WCIT risks reviving the divisive 2012 split outcome and would create

¹² <https://www.internetsociety.org/policybriefs/internetinterconnection/>,
<https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/policybriefs/2025/interconnection-and-regulated-traffic-obligations/>

¹³ <https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/policybriefs/2025/enhancing-the-resilience-of-submarine-internet-infrastructure/>

	an opening for treaty-level rules on matters better addressed through multistakeholder and technical processes.
Cybersecurity	The Internet Society supports ITU work on cybersecurity capacity-building that stays within ITU's technical assistance role and avoids duplicating or conflicting with the mandates of other UN cybersecurity processes and existing technical community efforts. The Internet Society advocates against proposals to elevate cybersecurity as a thematic priority in the ITU Strategic Plan and expand ITU's mandate in cybersecurity discussions across the UN system.

Note: The exact issues to be discussed at PP-26 will become known once the proposals emerge submitted upon completion of the regional preparatory processes. The Internet Society will provide updates via its ITU PP-26 website and ITU PP-26 Issues Matrix.

Internet-related Resolutions

As the Internet has grown and become more embedded in all facets of life, it has also become more integrated into UN and ITU activities. While the following are identified as the main Internet-related Resolutions, other Resolutions also increasingly include aspects related to the Internet. This is a list of resolutions that the Internet community should pay close attention.

Issues	Plenipotentiary Resolutions
Internet-related public policy issues	RES 101: Internet Protocol-based networks RES 102: ITU's role with regard to international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet and the management of Internet resources including domain names and addresses; RES 133: Role of administrations of Member States in the management of internationalized (multilingual) domain names RES 178: ITU role in organizing the work on technical aspects of telecommunication networks to support the Internet RES 180: Promoting deployment and adoption of IPv6 to facilitate the transition from IPv4 to IPv6 RES 206: OTTs

Issues	Plenipotentiary Resolutions
Cybersecurity: Confidence and security in the use of ICTs (incl. SPAM & CIRTs)	RES 130: Strengthening the role of ITU in building confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies RES 181: Definitions and terminology relating to building confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies RES 196: Protecting telecommunication service users/consumers
Child Online Protection and access to illegal information on the Internet	RES 174: ITU's role with regard to international public policy issues relating to the risk of illicit use of information and communication technologies RES 179: ITU's role in child online protection
WSIS+20, Digital Economy and SDGs	RES 140: ITU's role in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as in their follow-up and review processes RES 200: Connect 2030 Agenda for global telecommunication/information and communication technology, including broadband, for sustainable development RES 201: Creating an enabling environment for the deployment and use of information and communication technology applications RES 204: Use of information and communication technologies to bridge the financial inclusion gap RES 205: ITU's role in fostering telecommunication/ information and communication technology-centric innovation to support the digital economy and society
Role of Standardization and the ITU	RES 122: The evolving role of the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly RES 123: Bridging the standardization gap between developing and developed countries RES 135: ITU's role in the durable and sustainable development of telecommunications/ information and communication technologies, in providing technical assistance and advice to developing countries and in implementing relevant national, regional and interregional projects RES 178: ITU role in organizing the work on technical aspects of telecommunication networks to support the Internet

Issues	Plenipotentiary Resolutions
Digital Inclusion (Youth, Gender, Persons with Disabilities)	RES 70: Mainstreaming a gender perspective in ITU and promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women through telecommunications/information and communication technologies RES 175: Telecommunication/information and communication technology accessibility for persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs RES 198: Empowerment of youth through telecommunication/information and communication technology
Access and infrastructure	RES 137: Deployment of future networks in developing countries RES 139: Use of telecommunications/ information and communication technologies to bridge the digital divide and build an inclusive information society RES 203: Connectivity to broadband networks
Emerging technologies	RES 197: Facilitating the Internet of Things and smart sustainable cities and communities RES 214: Artificial intelligence technologies and telecommunications/ information and communication technologies
ITR Review and WTPF	RES: 146: Periodic review and revision of the International Telecommunication Regulations RES 2: World telecommunication/information and communication technology policy forum

Proposals concerning the above Resolutions will be tracked on the Internet Society's ITU Plenipotentiary 2026 Issues Matrix, to be released in October.

Engaging in the Regional Preparatory Meetings

Preparations for PP-26 run through the ITU's six Regional Telecommunication Organizations (RTOs), where Member States develop common proposals before the conference. These regional preparatory meetings are where negotiating positions are formed and where early engagement can have the most impact.

The Internet Society is participating in most major regional processes, tracking proposals as they develop and engaging delegations on issues of concern. At the conference itself, our delegation will participate in plenary sessions and conduct bilateral meetings with key delegations.

Forum	Region	Timing	Internet Society Engagement
African Telecommunications Union (ATU)	Africa	Ongoing	Participating
Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT)	Asia-Pacific	Ongoing	Participating
European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT)	Europe	Ongoing	Participating
Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL)	Americas	Ongoing	Participating
PP-26 Conference, Doha, Qatar	Global	9–27 Nov 2026	Delegation; bilateral meetings

We are also developing other resources to inform our community, support member engagement, and contribute to well-informed PP-26 outcomes:

Publication	Description	Status
Issues Matrix	A structured analysis of key proposals by issue area, regional group positions, and our analysis.	To be published in October.

How to Get Involved

The multistakeholder model of Internet governance is not guaranteed. It has to be defended, conference by conference, proposal by proposal. If the Internet community does not work together towards shared goals in Doha, the very things that make the Internet so valuable—its openness, its global reach, its capacity to connect and empower—risk being undermined. Average Internet users rarely hear of the ITU Plenipotentiary. But they will certainly feel its outcomes.

The Internet Society calls on its members, Internet Society chapters, technical community members, and civil society interested in the welfare of the Internet to monitor proposals to the Plenipotentiary Conference related to the Internet and to work with the Internet Society and its delegation to ensure outcomes consistent with the principles outlined above.

Look out for the Internet Society’s PP-26 Issues Matrix for structured tracking of proposals by issue area and regional group. Follow updates on the Internet Society’s [PP-26 page](#). Contact us at internetgovernance@isoc.org.

Internet Society chapters: Engage with your country's delegation before Doha. Ask your national administration what positions they will take on key Internet-related resolutions. Share this background paper and the Issues Matrix with national contact points at your Ministry of ICT or equivalent. Flag proposals of concern with your Community Engagement manager. Where possible, coordinate with other chapters in your region to amplify shared concerns.

Technical community members: Contribute your expertise to the preparatory process. Engage with ITU Sector Advisory Groups where relevant. Help document the technical risks of proposals that could affect the Internet, open standards, or the multistakeholder ecosystem.

In a world where so many experience globalization as a destabilizing force, the Internet is an example of how local efforts can shape global decision-making for the good of people. We should be proud of what we've built. And as members of the global Internet community, we must renew our efforts to ensure that the future of the Internet is written by those committed to making it a force for good. For everyone.