

DCMS Secretary of State speech – Declaration for the Future of the Internet

When the internet was invented back in the late 1980s, it was built on some core founding principles.

Egalitarianism.

Openness.

The idea that any individual from across the world could be interconnected with another.

As Tim Berners Lee, the Brit who invented the world wide web, put it: “This is for everyone.”

This Declaration for the Future of the Internet is a re-commitment to that vision.

It’s a commitment to defend an internet that is open and inclusive; an internet that respects human rights, privacy and freedom.

And I am enormously encouraged to see online safety is a key principle of that declaration.

As the UK’s Digital Secretary, doing more to protect people online is one of my main priorities – and last month, I was proud to introduce a groundbreaking Online Safety Bill to the UK Parliament that will make the internet safer for everyone.

Our legislation has the protection of children at its heart.

It will tackle criminal activity online.

And crucially, it is underpinned by our commitment to fundamental freedoms and human rights – particularly free speech.

I believe we’re at a turning point in the digital age.

We’re entering a new chapter where tech companies are held fully accountable for the content on their platforms...

...That they uphold their own promises to their users, to protect people from things like toxic racist and misogynistic abuse, and protect children from cyberbullying and other harmful behaviour...

That we make sure the internet is a place where people’s rights to participate in society and engage in robust debate are protected.

Our measures – and the measures that we’re seeing elsewhere, such as in the EU, and Australia – will help make the internet a safer place for everyone

And we’ll continue to work with international partners to ensure that the promise of a free, open and secure internet – one that everyone can participate in safely – is realised and defended.

To do that, we need a positive vision of the values that underpin our internet, and that should underpin the digital tech of the future.

Last year, I brought together a diverse set of countries and stakeholders at the Future Tech Forum and the UK led discussions at the global Internet Governance Forum to discuss exactly these values.

And our overriding conclusion was that the internet has been such a success because we’ve worked together on its governance – not just as governments but across civil society, technical experts and industry.

However, in recent years we’ve seen challenges to this approach.

Challenges that have sought to steer the internet away from what has made it so successful – in particular, the open and collaborative nature of its multi-stakeholder governance system – and ones that propose to remake the very core of the internet.

As open societies, we should be clear that we will resist attempts to bring the internet under restrictive government control – or to regulate it through concentrated, top-down processes.

It’s only by continuing to work together that we can capitalise on the benefits of a truly global internet that delivers for all.

The UK is proud to work with others in support of this aim, through this declaration, as well as through our own efforts to bring together stakeholders.

Ultimately, we are all here as we believe the internet holds the enormous potential to benefit our lives.

But over the coming decade, the challenge we face is to fight for those values – something that will require vigilance and proactive collaboration.

From the bedrock of the internet’s technical protocols to the safety of our citizens online, governments must come together to support this positive vision of an open, free and secure global internet for all.

This Declaration is an important step in that direction and I’m delighted to endorse it on behalf of the UK.