<u>**Independent Advisory Committee Annual Report**</u>
Timeframe: August 2022-July 2023
Report Delivery: September 30, 2023

<u>**Foreword from Chair of the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC)**</u>
The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) is a unique collaborative effort with the mission to mitigate the harmful exploitation of online platforms and technologies and reduce the spread of violent extremist and terrorist content online. Striving to be a global entity, GIFCT brings together the major tech companies to enhance their capacity to detect, remove, and counter extremist content online.

The IAC plays a pivotal role in this mission by bringing together governments, civil society organizations, and academia to collectively advise on pressing issues and foreseeable challenges. The IAC's main mission is to foster good governance, diversity and expansion, transparency, best practices, and policy coordination in order to enable GIFCT to enhance the capacity to curb the rising tide of online extremism and work consistently towards a safer, more inclusive online space. As part of its mission the IAC also holds the OB and GIFCT to account on delivery and outputs.

For its first formal annual report, the IAC demonstrates success in moving towards achieving some of these goals. The IAC also faced internal challenges as well as challenges in its relationship with GIFCT and with its Operating Board (OB).

This report presents these challenges and associated strategic recommendations for the next year in four sections: IAC successes and challenges in 2022/2023, IAC's view of Governance, IAC's Assessment of GIFCT Progress and Key Priorities, and Moving Forward.

<u>**Executive Summary**</u>

- The IAC believes in GIFCT's mission and is committed to supporting GIFCT's journey to become a unique partnership space for internet companies and platforms to innovatively find solutions to counter the exploitation of the online space by extremist groups, as well as role model the best standards for platforms to act responsibly towards their users.
- The IAC is looking forward to clear alignment with the OB and GIFCT on vision and strategy, respective roles and responsibilities. To help achieve this, the IAC recommends setting a clear governance structure and improved governance practices, particularly more transparency and regular communication on IAC advice.

- The IAC encourages the OB to better utilize its expertise in making strategic decisions when it comes to GIFCT. The IAC recommends that the OB communicates clearly to the IAC on decisions made on its advice.
- The IAC welcomes GIFCT's expansion from the four founding companies at inception in 2019 to 24 member companies today, six of which joined in the past year. However, the IAC strongly encourages further expansion, particularly to onboard smaller companies, higher risk platforms, different types of platforms, and increasing geographic and linguistic diversity.
- The IAC applauds GIFCT for its rigorous work on transparency reporting, and transparency assessments, particularly in relation to the assessment of its members' commitment to human rights. The IAC recommends GIFCT to include a forward looking section in its transparency reports on expected challenges to transparency and solutions.
- The IAC has become increasingly concerned by significant reductions in online trust and safety capabilities for certain platforms, and a perceived decrease in the priority of the issue, negatively impacting companies' ability to moderate extremist content online.
- The IAC welcomes the leadership of GIFCT in working group priority setting and coordination. The IAC recommends that working groups focus on development of technology and tools tailored to solutions, and increase engagement and participation of the tech sector in working groups.
- The IAC recommends that annual GIFCT summits be designed for more collaborative and expanded engagement between all member companies, civil society and governments.

Section 1: IAC Successes and Challenges in 2022/2023

1.1 IAC Successes:
The IAC worked on both its internal governance, structure and processes as well as gave formal advice on several topics to GIFCT in the form of written reports and bi-lateral advice during meetings with the Operating Board and GIFCT Secretariat.

Internal Governance
The IAC went through a time of transition in 2022-2023, onboarding a new Secretariat role and new Chair. Significant time and emphasis was placed on member feedback, retention and re-engagement prior to making any structural or governance changes as part of this transition.

To that end, the IAC has successfully achieved a cadence of substantive quarterly meetings with significant discussion and follow up via post-meeting deliverables. A comprehensive communication and feedback mechanism was also

established for the IAC, which allows for real-time discussion and efficient collaboration. By the end of 2023, the IAC will have a finalized Terms of Reference, Complaints Policy and Membership Rotation Policy and be ready to bring in at least five new members.

Advisory to the Operating Board

The IAC provided formal reports including collective views of its members on the subjects of: Working groups, and Platform Expansion and Risk Mitigation.

Oral and or memo feedback was given on the subjects of: The Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) report on location requirements, Working Group Topics, the Annual Summit Content and Structure, and Geographical Priorities.

In addition, the IAC delivered two advisory requests to the Operating Board regarding compliance by GIFCT member companies and hiring of the new Executive Director.

Currently, the IAC is developing memos on GIFCT fundraising and funding and on the Governance structure, which will be finalized in collaboration with GIFCT Executive Director and Operating Board chair.

1.2. IAC Challenges:
The IAC is still grappling with some challenges that will be addressed in the next year.

Internal Governance, Balance of Voices and Membership Recruitment

Firstly, the IAC has spent substantial time on setting its internal governance structure and processes, which reflect the complexity of issues at stake when creating a robust advisory body, that is truly multi stakeholder and diverse, while guaranteeing continuity, organizational memory and invested members. The three-year terms of initial IAC members expire in summer 2025, and the IAC will propose a rotation policy to the Operating Board that addresses those issues.

Secondly, ensuring the balance between government and civil society remains a top concern and priority. Governments have been actively involved in providing feedback and contributing to IAC reports. Due to capacity limitations, some IAC civil society members have been less engaged in providing feedback. Chair and Secretariat will continue implementing various tactics to encourage civil society engagement, including: individual 1:1s, key priority ownership, repeated requests. It is important to note that civil society members tend to become demotivated by slow responsiveness from the Operating Board or lack of clarity on how the IAC's input is integrated.

Third, some IAC members have left during the process and others had to be exited out of the IAC due to lack of involvement and non attendance to quarterly meetings. Consequently, IAC has several vacancies that the IAC will actively look to fill.

IAC-Operating Board Relations

The IAC-Operating Board relations have experienced much progress but also some challenges, more specifically around information sharing, trust, communication and traction of IAC advice. IAC members attribute this misalignment to problems with governance practices, which will be expanded fully in the next section.

Section 2: Governance practices

2.1 On Traction of IAC Advice and Communication :

The IAC is not clear on how the OB is requesting IAC advice (either with short turnaround or unclear tasking) and how it is onboarding the input and recommendations it submits into the decision making process. The IAC is then sometimes also not sighted on decision making and not included in important decisions that can impact GIFCT, such as decisions on company membership or on the annual multi stakeholder summit. This has been an important source of frustration and demotivation for many IAC members. While sometimes, the IAC has delayed in providing formal advice to GIFCT and the OB, other times, the IAC has not been given sufficient time to review documents to provide meaningful advice.

When input is provided by the IAC, GIFCT swiftly prepares a high-level acknowledgment and response to IAC advice, but it remains unclear how the OB then activates on GIFCT's response to IAC recommendations. Many times the IAC is not clear on what inputs have been accepted by the OB and how this advice was incorporated into OB or GIFCT processes, activities and operations.

We believe that this is addressed by an agreement for the bodies to work towards improving two-way communication and transparency, including through the recommendations below.

IAC and OB relations have consistently improved over the last year and bi-lateral communication between IAC and OB chairs have been substantial and frequent.

Recommendation:

1.) The IAC would like the OB to better utilize the expertise of the IAC in making strategic decisions when it comes to GIFCT.

2.) IAC wishes to receive requests for advice for the OB in a proactive rather than reactive manner. OB should provide their request and related documents one month in advance. If written advice in the form of a report

is requested from IAC, in order to give enough time for members to provide substantial responses.

3.) The IAC is requesting the OB provide documents clearly articulating what the OB is requesting from the IAC in terms of advice; documents with meaningful content for the IAC to review, while also explaining which content/decisions are deemed confidential and not appropriate for IAC review; and, documents provided in appropriate time for review (i.e., several weeks, where possible and where no urgent response is needed, to ensure a meaningful review by all IAC members).

1.) Responses to IAC reports and recommendations should be consolidated among GIFCT and the Operating Board before being shared with IAC membership to ensure alignment and establishment of cohesive next steps.

4.) The IAC recommends consolidated OB-GIFCT responses to be provided in writing on decisions made on its advice, with details on what advice will be onboarded, how, and what is not and why. This will help the IAC to ensure quality control and assess the impact of the expertise it provides. If there are concerns about confidentiality, non-disclosure agreements for IAC members can be explored.

5.) To improve transparency and two-way communication, IAC recommends quarterly IAC-OB meetings and bilateral written monthly communications from IAC to OB and back on progress on onboarding of IAC recommendations as well as progress by the OC on established goals for GIFCT.

2.2 On Vision and Strategy:
The IAC has been working with the OB and GIFCT Executive Director on finalizing a shared vision and strategy among the three entities.

A first priority for the OB and GIFCT is to determine where GIFCT sits in the digital ecosystem. Based on the ongoing discussions GIFCT's mission seems to align on a "by tech for tech ecosystem" rather than a full multistakeholder forum. Setting this mission with clarity and transparency is crucial as it impacts the goals, strategies and funding of GIFCT as well as the structure and composition of the OB itself. For example, If GIFCT is determined to be a multi stakeholder entity, then the OB should also expand and diversify its membership beyond tech companies.

Secondly, the vision for membership expansion and risk management among the three entities needs a deeper dive, to provide more clarity on where the misalignments are

and address them to set clear guidelines on membership and risk mitigation (e.g., tiered membership model).

Third and connected to the vision set for GIFCT as a global entity - further definition on what it means for GIFCT to be global needs to be determined (global in membership? or global in multistakeholderism?).

Recommendation:

1.) The IAC recommends OB, IAC and GIFCT sets a written clear mission for GIFCT, on whether it is "by tech for tech ecosystem" or a "multistakeholder forum" and the implications of that determination, before the end of the year 2023 and this vision be clearly communicated to platform members and stakeholders.

2.) The IAC recommends joint alignment at the start of each year among OB, IAC and GIFCT to agree on a set of shared objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the organization. This means we operate collectively, with a clear set of goals each year. The IAC recommends that quarterly IAC-OB meetings include review of progress on the KPIs.

3.) The OB and GIFCT can rely more on the IAC's contributions as a multistakeholder entity, particularly when planning GIFCT yearly multi stakeholder summit.

2.3 On Current Governance Practices:

In the last quarter, the IAC has been working with the OB on clarity around governance, particularly related to roles and responsibilities of each of the three entities, that is the IAC, OB and GIFCT.

The IAC and OB Chair have been involved in substantive and very collaborative conversations over the last three months in order to make progress on the issue of governance. To that matter the IAC has produced a short opinion on the current governance structure and its associated challenges. This opinion will serve as the basis of meetings to be held with the OB and Executive Director of GIFCT, who will work in collaboration to bring more clarity and operationalisation to the existing governance structure, communication and transparency.

Related to governance, the IAC mainly advises the Operating Board, as was originally determined at the founding of the Committee. In practice, in the spirit of transparency, the IAC also includes GIFCT's Executive Director in all advice matters and reports related to GIFCT. The IAC does, however, have concerns about the governance practices and more particularly transparency and communication. For example, the IAC was not consulted during the selection process for the new Executive Director, despite repeated requests. There has also been inconsistency on how and when the Operating Board (OB) both shares information and requests input from the Independent Advisory Committee and how this input is integrated.

The IAC and Operating Board chairs have discussed ways to improve communications, including the welcome step of having regular bilateral meetings between both chairs as well as quarterly IAC meetings with all Operating Board representatives.

Recommendation:

    1.) The IAC recommends annually presenting regular meetings with the OB chair and GIFCT Executive Director to ensure a continuous communication and transparency.

    2.) The IAC recommends more substantial discussion during the quarterly meetings between the IAC and OB, where we can hold each other to account in a transparent way on our execution toward our shared vision.

    3.) Once the functioning of the governance model is better established, the OB should consider providing detailed feedback to the IAC (with IAC respect for confidentiality agreements) when such information is relevant to the IAC being able to provide informed advice, including about membership decisions. This can be through the IAC Chair's continued participation in OB meetings but most importantly increasing the Chair's ability to share information about decisions with other IAC members. .

In addition, the IAC believes that the current challenges related to governance are also due to : 1) Need for a shared vision and strategy among the three entities, 2) challenges with communication (including resolving confidentiality concerns as needed) and 3) obstacles to adoption of IAC's advice to the Operating Board. We will expand on these points below and provide recommendations.

2.4 On Operating Board Structure:
The IAC perceives that the OB has been slow on achieving some of its own objectives and changes to its operating structure. For example, the OB bylaws state that additional members need to be included in the OB. The IAC acknowledges that the OB is in the process of doing so, but no timeline for achieving this milestone has been determined, which may result in deprioritization.

Recommendations:

    1.) IAC recommends the OB establishes a deadline for the inclusion of a smaller platform member, with a deadline of no later than mid year 2024.

    2.) The IAC recommends consistency in applying GIFCT membership principles and standards, applying the same principles for the OB member companies as for existing and new membership.

3. IAC Assessment of GIFCT Progress and Key Priorities

3.1 Transparency

The IAC applauds GIFCT for its rigorous work on transparency reporting, and transparency assessments, particularly in relation to the assessment of its members' commitment to human rights.

GIFCT transparency reports are very informative and complete in terms of GIFCT progress, activities and outputs. The IAC sees added value in having the transparency reports evolve from being a summary of activities laid out (which are activity reports) to positioning GIFCT as a thought leader on the subject of transparency itself in terms of listing challenges faced by the organization and its member platforms and solutions foreseen or implemented.

The IAC has become increasingly concerned by significant reductions in online trust and safety capabilities for certain platforms,and a perceived decrease in the priority of the issue, impacting companies' ability to moderate extremist content online (reduced their Trust and Safety teams, change in moderation policies or enforcement). While this connects to the issue of members complying with GIFCT standards, it is also tightly connected to transparency of platforms and trust more generally. In this sense, it remains unclear to the IAC how GIFCT is monitoring and assessing these changes on an ongoing basis and staying abreast of subsequent consequences for member platforms. A more vigorous assessment of capabilities is important as some current member platforms have not been meeting the basic commitment to address terrorist and violent extremist content online.

Recommendations:

1.) The IAC recommends GIFCT to include a forward looking section in its transparency report on expected challenges to transparency, for example in relation to changing extremism landscape, newer technologies (e.g. AI) and changing member platform moderation policies and capacities.

2.) The IAC recommends GIFCT improves its assessment of current and prospective member platforms by going beyond the current standard of member platforms commitment to human rights. To ensure greater transparency by platforms, the IAC recommends GIFCT assesses member platforms' capacity and progress in addressing terrorist and violent extremist content online, in relation, for example, to the platforms' moderation capacity and policies (e.g., human and AI capacity for moderation) and transparent reporting of capacities and limitations.

3.2 Membership Expansion

In September 2022, the IAC provided a full report on membership expansion for GIFCT and risk assessment and mitigation mechanisms. The IAC received a detailed response from GIFCT in support of most of IAC recommendations. IAC acknowledges the substantive effort made by GIFCT to onboard new members. GIFCT increased from 18 to 24 members from August 2022 to June 2023, which was to date their largest number of companies joining in a 12 months period. While this is encouraging, the IAC considers that the pace of adding new members has been slow. This is partly due to challenges in working with the OB as well as key partners of the onboarding process in addition to applicant member companies' pace in completing the onboarding process. Of note, the new members onboarded did not significantly improve the diversity of GIFCT in key areas recommended by the IAC.

In accordance with recommendations that the IAC provided in its report to the OB on this matter, we highlight the following key areas:

Recommendations:

1. The IAC encourages GIFCT to focus on its unique and added value to member companies, and to prioritize work streams that will ultimately incentivise companies to apply and to become members (e.g., use horizon scanning to focus on emerging threats and/or take requests from members to inform prioritisation)

2. The IAC would like to see improved transparency of membership decisions, including better communication on decision-making rationale, seeking advice prior to membership decisions, and receiving more information on the companies in the membership pipeline.

3. The IAC recommends that GIFCT focus on the following elements for membership expansion:
   - The IAC recommends onboarding high risk platforms as these pose the highest risks from TVEC on their platforms and consequently are the ones which will likely benefit most from GIFCT tools and solutions. A tiered membership model can help mitigate certain associated risk and speed up the membership expansion of GIFCT.

   - The IAC recommends onboarding smaller platforms. Increasingly smaller platforms are exploited by terrorists and violent extremists, to spread harmful and violent content on their services. These platforms often lack the resources and capacity to effectively address this online activity on their services. Again they consequently are the most likely to benefit from GIFCT tools and solutions.

- The IAC recommends improving platform type diversity. Increasingly harmful actors are shifting to non-traditional social media platforms, in particular, utilizing gaming and gaming adjacent platforms to reach new recruits or spread their narratives. Currently, the GIFCT is primarily comprised of social media platforms, with the exception of a few platforms. The GIFCT will benefit from adapting its membership model in order to be able to onboard such "non-traditional" platforms.

- The IAC recommends improving geographical and linguistic diversity. The majority of GIFCT membership are located in North America and/or Europe. To meet this goal, the OB needs to support GIFCT's work across non-English language and non-western platforms/companies. This is a crucial issue as the tech markets of these companies/platforms continue to experience rapid growth, making these countries some of the highest globally for social media users.

3.3. Working Group Progress

In 2022, the IAC submitted a report with formal recommendations on the working groups to GIFCT and OB. The IAC received a formal response from GIFCT and over the course of the following months, the IAC noted that several of the recommendations had been implemented. IAC welcomes the greater leadership of GIFCT in the working group priority setting and coordination. At the one year completion of another round of working groups, the IAC would like to highlight some remaining gaps/issues and how best to address them moving forward.

Attendance and engagement in the working groups has improved overall, particularly from academia and civil society members. However, the platforms do not seem to have steady participation in and commitment to the working groups, with their representatives at times absent and when present not actively participating in the meetings. The IAC also feels the working groups are still too academic/think tank focused as reflected also by their outputs (i.e., reports or research). A related issue is the fact that it is unclear who and how the priorities for working groups are set and how they directly lead to substantive outputs.

Recommendations:

1.) The IAC recommends that working groups need to move more away from an academic/think tank focused discussion, to working on development of new technology, tools and other useful outputs that are tailored to solutions rather than a better understanding of a given issue. GIFCT could develop "action plans'' around working group outputs to ensure they are driving change and that working group outputs, where relevant, are building on top of existing GIFCT work.

2.) The IAC recommends GIFCT to build solutions that increase engagement and participation of the tech sector in working groups. One solution may be to have tech platforms co-lead the working groups and provide key challenges and tooling needs that the other members of the working groups can co-develop solutions for.

3.) The IAC recommends for GIFCT to clearly operationalise the process of working group priority topics, ideally beforehand by engaging proactively with member platforms and other members of GIFCT's multistakeholder forum. The aim is to ensure relevance and buy- in from the platform as well as the other stakeholders.

4.) When tangible outputs are produced, we recommend that GIFCT encourage and oversee the implementation of these outputs by the respective organizations and platforms. This will also provide more transparency and allow for assessment of information on the utility of working groups' outputs, their applicability and impacts.

3.4 Fundraising

GIFCT is the subject of high expectations and many demands that are at times out of sync with its current human resources and financial capacities. The IAC acknowledges GIFCT's interest and efforts in seeking external funding. While GIFCT needs to expand its financial capacities, the IAC believes that there is a need for significant further unpacking of whether seeking external funding is appropriate, and if so, the best way to go about it . The IAC will be more thoroughly advising on the topic of funding in the coming year.

3.5 Global Summit

GIFCT's annual summit is an important opportunity to bring together a diverse group of multi-stakeholder actors to discuss and highlight key issues relating to online trust and safety and mitigation of extremist content online.

The Summit provides a unique format in which to discuss current risks, foresee coming challenges and debate solutions, build relationships among and between platforms and human rights, and civil society.

The IAC has been consulted during the planning phases of the summit in 2022 and 2023. However the advice given by the IAC has not been integrated into summit design for productive multistakeholder engagement i.

The IAC wants to reinforce support for key priorities of the Summit as:
- Opportunity for more and expanded engagement between *all* member companies, civil society and governments

- Create space and time for idea generation on future work and impact of GIFCT

Recommendations:

1.) We recommend early consultation of the IAC in choosing dates, location and designing the agenda and objectives in line with its advisory.

2.) We encourage the GIFCT to take a longer-term approach to the planning of the Summit - securing of dates and spaces at least 8 months in advance to allow for adequate notice for IAC members and other attendees.

3.) We recommend the workshops and activities during the summit to be much more interactive (e.g., even led by member platforms) and solutions oriented bringing members together in collaborative spaces to focus on key priority needs and challenges for the platforms such as: HSDB, Tech solutions to moderation and risk mitigation, system approach to processes, legal enabling environment, company-level needs, AI, among others.

Section 4: THE IAC MOVING FORWARD (2023-2024)

Over the course of the past three years, the IAC has matured and gained good momentum in terms of its engagement with GIFCT and the OB in the provision of tangible advice. Some of its outputs have been delayed by the necessary process of setting a transparent and robust internal governance structure and mechanisms, as well as transparent and continuous communication with the OB.

Improving the IAC's advisory function is a priority for the upcoming year. In 2024 the IAC will dedicate its expertise and energies to providing effective strategic advice to GIFCT and OB on GIFCT priorities and substantive areas of work, funding, membership expansion, and working group topics and outputs.

The IAC plans to increase volume of interactions with the OB, GIFCT's ED to include monthly bilats. The IAC also plans to increase interactions with member platforms and working groups by inviting some to discuss needs and challenges during IAC quarterly meetings. The IAC recommends meeting with member platforms during the annual summit.

The IAC will continue providing substantial advice by finding solutions to increase participation of all its members, particularly civil society members, as well as expand its

membership by filling up the current vacancies and seeking specific expertise areas that the IAC is lacking at the moment. Expanding IAC membership will also support its membership rotation that will commence in summer 2025.

Conclusion

With its global and diverse membership, the IAC is at the forefront of bringing policy, academia and practice together to provide advice to OB and GIFCT on mitigating technology risks. At the June 2023 meeting between the IAC and the OB, both entities committed to improving two-way communication.

In the coming year, the IAC believes that the success for GIFCT is intricately tied to achieving three milestones.

First, is to set clear communication processes and ways to improve transparency between the three bodies (OB, IAC, GIFCT). This will make the decision-making more transparent and more collaborative between the OB and the IAC.

The second milestone will be to expand membership at a faster pace, including more diversity in the size, type and location of platforms. Currently GIFCT's limited globalness creates pockets of unchecked extremist activity, particularly in regions of political and social instability.

That said, GIFCT is uniquely positioned to be able to resolve this limitation as it promotes a multi-pronged approach that not only acknowledges the differences in capabilities but also promotes collaboration, knowledge sharing, and innovative solutions across the spectrum of internet platforms. This is why a top priority for GIFCT is to significantly improve the diversity of its platform members to ensure a holistic approach to addressing terrorist and violent extremist use of the internet. To help this process, the IAC reiterates the importance of its inclusion in decision making, as well as providing more transparency around membership decisions by the OB. This would include better communication on decision-making rationale, seeking advice prior to membership decisions, and receiving more information on the companies in the membership pipeline.

The third milestone is expansion of the OB itself to ensure greater representation of its membership, particularly inclusion of smaller platforms. While big tech companies who compose the OB wield considerable resources and infrastructure to combat online extremism, smaller platforms often grapple with limited capacities and resources. This dichotomy results in disparities in content moderation, allowing extremist groups to persist on platforms with fewer resources for enforcement and moderation. Having such

smaller platforms join the OB will thus allow for the current members of the OB to capture and include the unique realities and challenges these platforms face.

Finally, The IAC believes in GIFCT's mission and is committed to supporting GIFCT's journey to become a unique partnership space for internet companies and platforms to innovatively find solutions to counter the exploitation of the online space by extremist groups, as well as role model the best standards for platforms to act responsibly towards their users. The IAC reinforces its commitment to providing the highest level of multi-stakeholder advisory to GIFCT, the OB and member platforms and looks forward to can be accomplished in the coming year.

Ghayda Hassan
IAC chair

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IAC Membership