DRAPAC23 Assembly

Digital Rights Asia-Pacific 2023

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Setting the Stage

The 2023 Digital Rights Asia Pacific Assembly (DRAPAC23) has its roots in the Coconet series camps organised by EngageMedia and its partners in the Philippines and Indonesia. These camps provided a platform for digital rights advocates to come together and discuss pressing issues. Originally scheduled for 2021, the Assembly was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

EngageMedia set the stage for DRAPAC23 through a series of online and in-person convenings, starting with the 2022 Country Forums in Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, and the Philippines. Building on this momentum, the 2023 Asia-Pacific Digital Rights Forum brought together participants from Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and other countries around a range of digital rights issues. Finally, DRAPAC23 took place in Chiang Mai, spanning five days and featuring a diverse range of sessions. The Assembly brought together digital and human rights advocates, journalists, media-makers, artists, designers, technologists, youth advocates, and representatives from marginalised communities. It was a platform for networking, learning, and collaboration, with a focus on amplifying the voices of those often unheard in digital rights spaces.

EngageMedia worked with the DRAPAC Steering Committee and various partners, fellows, and participants in co-creating the DRAPAC23 agenda. This approach ensured that the effort was anchored in the pressing needs and aspirations of the digital rights community in the Asia-Pacific. Additionally, the launch of the DRAPAC Network, supported by a Steering Committee composed of active organisations working on digital rights, marked an important milestone in the movement.

Another crucial aspect of the preparations was ensuring a diversity of voices. We opened a call for fellowship applications, offering financial support to those in need. After reviewing nearly 170 applications, we selected 124 fellows from various countries, including Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, Mongolia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Germany, Australia, Ireland, and Timor-Leste. This cohort represented a range of backgrounds, promoting cross-cultural dialogue and inclusivity.

Drawing 544 participants from 35 countries, DRAPAC23 was a culmination of efforts to scale the digital rights movement, foster connections across allied sectors, and engage young advocates. It provided a vibrant and inclusive space for participants to connect, learn, and collaborate, ultimately advancing digital rights in the Asia-Pacific region.
Making It Happen

Over the course of the week, a total of 544 participants from 35 countries converged in Chiang Mai. Participants included digital and human rights advocates, journalists, media-makers, artists, designers, technologists, youth advocates, and representatives from marginalised communities.

While the Assembly focused on participants from the region (about 510 attendees, including EngageMedia staff, are based in the Asia-Pacific), over 30 changemakers from the rest of the globe attended. Of the 535 participants who filled out the registration form in full, 54% identified as female, 38% identified as male, 4% identified as non-binary, 3% preferred not to disclose, and 1% preferred to self-identify.

DRAPAC23 fellowship. A total of 124 fellows from 20 countries have been supported to participate at DRAPAC23. In terms of gender, 44.3% of the fellows identify as female, 46% identify as male, and 9.7% percent identify as gender-diverse.

Moreover, about 25% of the DRAPAC23 budget went to supporting the DRAPAC Fellowship, demonstrating our commitment to ensuring diversity and inclusion in participation. One fellow noted, “I am grateful for the chance to participate in such an impactful event and would like to express my sincere appreciation.”
Building Knowledge

DRAPAC23 offered a comprehensive program comprising 161 sessions on a range of topics and formats (see figure below). This diverse line-up ensured there was something for everyone, fostering meaningful discussions and knowledge exchange.

Session hosts and facilitators were drawn from 31 different countries, providing a truly global perspective to the event. With a rich mix of backgrounds and expertise, hosts and facilitators contributed to the diverse and inclusive nature of DRAPAC23. Moreover, a diverse team of 34 volunteers proficient in English, Thai, Burmese, and other languages boosted on-the-ground support.

Participant experience. DRAPAC23 included interviews with participants to capture their experiences and perceptions of the community atmosphere. These on-the-ground conversations provided real-time insights for the organising team.

The overall DRAPAC23 experience received positive feedback, with 85% of surveyed participants rating it as excellent or good. Participants eagerly shared their overall experience at DRAPAC23, describing it as “enlightening” and “transformative”. The Assembly served as a catalyst for like-minded organisations to collaborate, expand their networks, and forge meaningful connections. Participants expressed gratitude for the inclusive space that encouraged them to learn, share, and grow together. One participant reflected, “It has been a wonderful experience, and we hope to be invited again in the upcoming conferences.”
Participants noted the high level of engagement, with 78% agreeing that sessions effectively addressed key themes related to digital rights. Another 78% perceived facilitators as having the required expertise and credibility, contributing to the overall participant experience.

Various highlights of participation emerged. One participant particularly enjoyed the roundtables, emphasising the importance of diverse insights and perspectives. Another highlighted session relevance, stating, “I know more about the condition of what’s happening in different countries, which was quite unfamiliar to me.” Participants also appreciated the informative and engaging nature of the discussions, which broadened their knowledge and perspectives on digital rights. Some, however, expressed the need for a better understanding of certain topics beforehand to foster more productive discussions. “If some background information could be provided before the workshops, we could tackle the real problems more effectively,” suggested one participant.

Participants follow the story of Grandma Pining and her 20-year-old granddaughter Liwayway in an interactive workshop on online health misinformation and fact-checking by Philippine media nonprofit VERA Files.

Participants felt actively engaged and included in the activities. Small group discussions were particularly effective in facilitating participant engagement and interaction. Creative methods in workshops were appreciated, such as the way one session utilised card games to forecast digital rights issues needing attention in the next decade. One participant mentioned, “We had small FGDs on what value the network would give to our organisation, and it was refreshing to hear different perspectives come together.”
Engaging in DRAPAC23 significantly increased participants' knowledge of internet freedom issues across various countries, as reported by 82% of surveyed participants. Participants expressed a strong confidence in applying the knowledge and skills acquired during DRAPAC23 in their work or activism, with 73% of surveyed participants expressing this sentiment.

**Cinemata Big Screen.** The Cinemata Big Screen program was a parallel mini-film festival that explored the complexities of digital rights in the Asia-Pacific region. Over the course of a week, participants were immersed in a curated selection of 28 thought-provoking films that tackled critical issues in an increasingly digitised world. The program addressed themes of online freedom, surveillance, and data justice. The films highlighted included “Terror Contagion” (on the use of Pegasus malware), “John Denver Trending” (on social media’s impact), and “People’s Republic of Desire” (on the influence of live streaming in China).

Selected screenings featured talkback sessions that provided participants with the opportunity to interact with filmmakers, educators, and human and digital rights activists. These sessions created a space for in-depth discussions, allowing attendees to delve into the themes and messages portrayed in the films. Cinemata Big Screen was a testament to the profound impact of storytelling and the importance of using film as a catalyst for dialogue, awareness, and collective action in advancing digital rights in the Asia-Pacific.

*Cinemata Big Screen also held solidarity screenings featuring short films by and talkback sessions with filmmakers from Thailand and Myanmar. Pictured above are Prapasiri Suttisome (EngageMedia), Weeraya Vichayaprasertkul (filmmaker, “Pad Thai”), Supamok Silarak (filmmaker, “Red Poetry”), Vitthaya Klangnil (performance artist), and Prapassorn Konmuang (Lanyim Theater).*
Tech Tales Youth. Four young filmmakers from the Philippines and Thailand attended DRAPAC23 as part of Tech Tales Youth, a digital rights mentorship program. They also met experts from the Video4Change Network who facilitated masterclasses on advocacy filmmaking and introduction to impact production.

Tech Tales Youth filmmakers were among the most active audience members at Cinemata Big Screen, showing their enthusiasm to know more about digital rights filmmaking. On the last day of screenings, the Thai filmmakers were invited as panellists in the Myanmar Solidarity Film Programme organised by Exile Hub and Burma Wide Angle Organization (BWA). Their participation as panellists displayed their solidarity with the Myanmar people in their fight for democracy.

The filmmakers also had the chance to meet briefly with a representative of the Open Society Foundation to explore ways to distribute digital rights films on Netflix, Amazon Prime, and other video-on-demand platforms popular in the region. Overall, the Tech Tales Youth filmmakers had an enriching DRAPAC23 experience, learning new skills, interacting with experts, and connecting with like-minded individuals and organisations.

Pretty Good Podcast. Pretty Good Podcast Live at DRAPAC23 is a special series of Pretty Good Podcast, recorded live and featuring a number of DRAPAC23 participants working across pressing digital rights issues. We recorded a total of 15 episodes, highlighting the following organisations and advocates in the region:

1. Athan - Freedom of Expression Activist Organization
2. Centre for Internet and Society
3. Digital Rights Nepal
4. East West Management Institute
5. The Financial Express
6. Filipino Freethinkers
7. Global Voices
8. IDEALS Inc.
9. KRYSS Network
10. NUMUN Fund
11. Open Culture Foundation Taiwan
12. Ranking Digital Rights
13. Security Matters
14. Sinar Project
15. A Myanmar social technology researcher

In the interviews, participants shared the sessions they attended and/or hosted at DRAPAC23, and how the sessions helped them cultivate a deeper understanding of digital rights initiatives and a greater sense of solidarity with fellow players in the field.

As of writing, four of the 15 episodes have been published on EngageMedia.org/Podcast.

Myanmar-related activities. DRAPAC23 featured 11 sessions, 3 photo exhibitions, and 2 Pretty Good Podcast (PGP) episodes related to Myanmar issues. Below are the sessions that served to expand participants’ awareness and understanding of the Myanmar context:
1. Alternative Communication in Myanmar
2. Weaponization of Internet Shutdowns in Myanmar
3. Internet Shutdowns and Restrictions: Rethinking Documentation Methodologies
4. Reporting on Myanmar in the Age of Digital Authoritarianism
5. Surviving Digital Security Threats During Arrest by Insurgent Arms Group: Real Life Experiences
6. Who Cares If It's False? It's Making Us Tons of Money!
7. The Vital Role of Community Networks in Supporting the Pro-Democracy Movement in Myanmar
8. Community Radio that Emerged after the Burmese Coup: The Revolutionary Radio
9. Myanmar Solidarity Night: Uniting through Culture, Empowering through Awareness
10. Myanmar Solidarity Screening
11. Research Kickoff: Digital Security Challenges of Myanmar’s Journalists

Internet Monitoring Action Program (iMAP). EngageMedia contributed to sharing sessions hosted by Sinar Project on the 2022 state of internet censorship country reports, reviewing Citizen Lab country test lists, and using OONI Probe to monitor internet interference. EngageMedia also took part in the post-DRAPAC23 iMAP country partner workshop, where we discussed streamlining the 2023 country reports with common key metrics on internet censorship, coordinating outreach efforts after publication of the reports, and extending the study with specific focus on internet censorship related to key human rights issues such as religious freedom, gender and sexuality, political participation, and media freedom.

Co-designing for diversity and inclusion. In the lead-up to the Assembly, we also organised pre-DRAPAC23 huddles as a collaborative platform for partner organisations, fellows, and participants to contribute to the co-creation of the Assembly’s Code of Conduct, Privacy Policy, and Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy. These fostered open dialogue and allowed for the exchange of ideas, ensuring that participants felt a sense of ownership and were actively engaged in shaping the event. They were also instrumental in establishing norms around DRAPAC23 participation and laying the groundwork for the DRAPAC Network.

Privacy-respecting online verification system. Ensuring safety and security is crucial for all participants, particularly those facing higher risks. We recognised the need to go beyond traditional verification methods, as concerns such as surveillance and prosecution posed serious threats. Existing systems often demand excessive private information without effectively addressing the problem. Internal deliberation and consultation with partners helped us develop our own peer-to-peer verification system.
A. Overview
To ensure a level of trust and safety at DRAPAC23, the organisers have implemented a peer-to-peer (P2P) verification system that allows registered attendees to vouch for each other as trusted contacts. This will help the organisers identify and respond to potential safety and security threats at the event.

The P2P verification system relies on a chain of peer-vouched trusted contacts connected to the DRAPAC23 core organising team members. Registered attendees who are vouched by another within four degrees of separation from the DRAPAC23 core organising team members will have access to restricted content on this site and restricted spaces at the event.

You need at least one person vouching for you to be part of this chain for your verification to be complete. Your verification is not complete if no one vouching for you is part of the chain of peer-vouched trusted contacts. In this case, you may not have access to restricted content on this site or restricted spaces at the event.

B. Get Verified
To get verified, request another registered attendee or an EngageMedia staff member who you know to vouch for you as a trusted contact. They need to log in to their account and enter your registered email address on this page (see Section C below). After that, they will receive an automated email to complete the verification process.

If you wish to be anonymous, please consider using a disposable email address and a pseudonym. You may change your registered email address and name on the My Account page. Make sure to inform the person vouching for you know your email address and pseudonym.

A screenshot of the peer-to-peer verification page on the DRAPAC23 website.
Read more about this process on EngageMedia.org.
Building Collaborations

The Assembly’s ability to bring together a diverse group of individuals and to foster partnerships that transcend geographical boundaries. Participants appreciated the ample opportunities for networking and collaboration during DRAPAC23, with 88% of surveyed participants agreeing. Additionally, 79% acknowledged that the Assembly fostered a sense of community and encouraged interaction among participants. This highlights the event’s success in creating a supportive and collaborative environment for networking and building connections.

DRAPAC23 facilitated collaboration and networking, leading to the formation of partnerships and synergies among participants. Contact details were exchanged, and potential collaborations explored. A notable example is a participant from a Taiwan-based organisation who was afforded an avenue to expand their network to Indonesia and the Philippines.

Participants also expressed their intentions to apply the knowledge and skills gained from DRAPAC23 in their work and activism, sharing their learnings with colleagues and incorporating new perspectives into future activities. “DRAPAC23 will be the start of our platform on digital rights, and we will reach out to partners and collaborate further,” expressed one participant, exemplifying Assembly’s impact.

DRAPAC23 also nurtured a curiosity for exploring how artificial intelligence (AI) can have a socio-cultural impact. One participant shared their intention to research how AI is influencing gendered online hate speech and tech-facilitated gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.

Campaigns borne out of DRAPAC23 were also discussed, such as an ongoing campaign on ASEAN coalition to #StopDigitalDictatorship by the Manushya Foundation. Other organisations considered expanding their legal services to cover digital rights and online gender-based violence.
Solidifying the DRAPAC Steering Committee. Months of coordination led up to DRAPAC23, where the Steering Committee had their first in-person meeting. Despite previous online interactions, the physical gathering strengthened their rapport. The solidarity dinner, casual conversations, and planning meetings further nurtured this camaraderie.

These meetings focused on organising the two plenary sessions for DRAPAC23. The first session introduced participants to the Network, where we shared the history and vision for the Network. The second session sought input and feedback from attendees, asking about their expectations and time commitment to the Network.

Both plenary sessions were co-facilitated by Steering Committee members. From ten breakout groups, we have confirmation about the need and value of a regional network, and ideas for how individual organisations can contribute.

The formation of working groups or committees was proposed for specific projects or initiatives. These groups could take the lead in carrying out specific action plans.
Fostering collaboration and local solidarity among Thai participants. On May 23 and 24, two side events were conducted with the goal of promoting local solidarity and fostering connections among Thai participants. Chiang Mai’s political activist spaces served as suitable venues for discussions on digital rights and authoritarianism. The Thai side events provided a platform for networking, collaboration, and sharing good practices exclusively among Thai participants. They offered the chance to showcase projects, address challenges and successes, and establish a basis for ongoing collaboration beyond DRAPAC23.

In the Thai session titled “The Way Forward for Thai HRDs: State-sponsored Online Disinformation and Strategic Litigation,” panellists discussed how civil society and human rights defenders can counter state-sponsored disinformation and online harassment. They highlighted non-legal measures like doxxing and online disinformation used by state officials to suppress government critics and emphasised the need to compel platforms to provide necessary data to assist the litigation. The session also addressed the harmful impact of platform algorithms that contribute to echo chambers and citizen-driven disinformation. Panellists included Wannaphat Jenroumjit (Thai Lawyers for Human Rights), Korbkusol Neelapaijit (Asia Centre), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tossapon Tassanakunlapan (Chiang Mai University’s Faculty of Law), and Yingcheep Atchawakom (Internet Dialogue on Law Reform [iLaw]).
Korbkusol Neelapajit, researcher at Asia Centre (centred) shed light on the utilisation of cyberarmy, employed by state officials to silence dissidents.

Supporting Myanmar activists. DRAPAC23 was a key venue for the Myanmar digital rights community to address their issues and engage in networking in an in-person setting this year. Moreover, some Myanmar activists faced visa rejections for the Stockholm Internet Forum 2023 and RightsCon23. DRAPAC23 thus proved to be an even more crucial event for them to directly advocate their needs to an international audience.

The Myanmar Solidarity Night was a collaborative effort between the Myanmar exile activist community and EngageMedia. The program for the night was co-designed with 30 changemakers who attended the Myanmar Community Meetup for DRAPAC23 Myanmar Solidarity Night. This event combined culture, art, and information on the situation in Myanmar, featuring poetry readings, traditional dance performances, the launch of a photo exhibition, informative short videos, an open mic session, and fundraising activities.

The Myanmar Solidarity Screening was another accomplishment, serving as a platform for Myanmar filmmakers to showcase their work and to communicate the current crisis of Myanmar. The talkback session featured and connected Thai and Myanmar filmmakers. Established at DRAPAC23, BWA collaborated with the Cinemata Big Screen team for the Myanmar Solidarity Screening, and are planning to launch a Myanmar Film Festival in Chiang Mai. DRAPAC23 has expanded BWA’s network and provided new opportunities for collaboration.

The Myanmar Internet Project (MIP) has been actively researching alternative communication methods in Myanmar. Building on this research, MIP and EngageMedia have collaborated to create an advocacy campaign aimed at garnering support and funding for finding solutions to alternative communication in Myanmar.
Digital rights in Thailand. EngageMedia's Digital Rights - Thailand (DR-TH) project partnered with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) to co-host three sessions alongside organisations like New Naratif and IDEALS, Inc. This collaboration allowed political representatives from multiple countries to participate in the DRAPAC23 Assembly, giving them insights into regional digital rights issues and engaging with CSO representatives. An anticipated MP from the Move Forward Party delivered a compelling presentation on laws and jurisprudence in relation to women's rights in the digital age.

This collaboration enabled the participation of eight Thai activists, defenders, and media professionals at DRAPAC23. They connected with potential collaborators, donors, and activists at the regional level, and some received support from digital security clinic experts. Additionally, the Assembly strengthened EngageMedia’s partnership with the School of Public Policy through a foresight workshop.

Greater Internet Freedom in South and Southeast Asia. EngageMedia organised two side events for country partners and digital rights and safety advocates from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Maldives, Nepal, Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Participants tackled current and foreseeable digital safety and rights priorities in the focus countries, as well as available digital rights and safety resources and opportunities. They also discussed a regional advocacy roadmap for digital rights and safety for South and Southeast Asia.

A lightning talk by researcher Shruti Trikanad focused on digital ID systems in the region. Participants discussed policies, trends, and safeguards for accountability.
Tatjana Ljubic, MEL Specialist of the Greater Internet Freedom Program, spoke on using impact data for sustainability. Vino Lucero, then EngageMedia’s GIF project lead, moderated a panel on the intersectionality of digital rights work.

**#PushBackUNESCO.** Another key collaboration initiated at DRAPAC23 was **#PushBackUNESCO**, in response to [UNESCO’s Guidelines for Regulating Digital Platforms](https://www.unesco.org/en/unesco-philosophyclarations/guidelines-regulating-digital-platforms). A group of civil society representatives were worried that UNESCO has not considered safeguards to protect against significant risks, such as emboldening authoritarian regulators.

The first major push to gather signatures was done at the event and through event-related communication. The #PushBack group has grown, started dialogue with relevant decision-makers, and continues to coordinate using the same private chat group started at DRAPAC23. The conversation has continued in other venues such as Stockholm Internet Forum and RightsCon.

**Supporting participants via open and secure technology.** Throughout the event, EngageMedia distributed 582 Proton unlimited plan vouchers, 150 2FA hardware keys from Yubikey, and 69 Tunnelbear unlimited VPN vouchers to participants. These resources aimed to enhance participants’ online privacy and security by providing secure access to communication, data storage, and anonymous browsing.

Alongside resource distribution, an on-site digital safety clinic assisted around 20 individuals, offering personalised guidance on digital security concerns. The clinic was a weeklong collaboration with Access Now, ARTICLE19, Citizen Lab, Cyber Skill Asia, Digital Defenders Partnership, Front Line Defenders, Thai Netizen Network, SecDev Foundation, and Security Matters. We also conducted two training sessions, equipping participants with valuable knowledge and skills for secure navigation of the digital landscape.

**Media partnerships and coverage.** In the leadup to DRAPAC23, we prioritised media partnerships and promotions with local organisations based in Thailand, especially in Chiang Mai, which serves as a hub for Thai and Burmese activists.

We worked together with independent Chiang Mai-based media outlet [Lanner News](https://lannernews.com) to promote DRAPAC23 to local civil society, students, filmmakers, and the general public keen to learn more about digital rights. As an official media partner, Lanner published [five articles](https://lannernews.com) (written in Thai) and two social media campaigns, and took charge of the official DRAPAC23 live stream for plenary sessions.
DRAPAC23 was also featured by official media partner Global Voices, Thailand news outlet Prachatai, Burmese media outlet Delta News Agency, and Philippine media nonprofit Vera Files. Participants also ensured to promote their sessions at the Assembly and afterward share their experiences to their respective networks, including but not limited to the following:

1. Asia Center
2. Asia Indigenous People’s Pact
3. The Bachchao Project
4. Body & Data
5. Bulatlat
6. Burma Wide Angle
7. CCCL Film Festival
8. Computer Professionals’ Union (PH)
9. Diakonia in Asia
10. Digital Defenders Partnership
11. Digital Rights Nepal
12. Factor Daily
13. Forus International
14. The IO Foundation
15. Media Matters for Democracy
16. Milk Tea Alliance
17. Myanmar Media in Transition
18. Numun Fund
19. Oxen Labs
20. Ranking Digital Rights
21. Roskilde University
22. Safer Nepal
23. Thibi.co
24. WFD Indonesia
25. WITNESS Asia-Pacific
Building Momentum: Ways Forward

Maximising the impact of DRAPAC23 requires ensuring that its influence extends beyond the event, reaching participants’ communities, countries, and beyond. Sustaining the energy and effort beyond DRAPAC23 will be challenging. Our experience from previous camps and events confirms this. While participants show enthusiasm during the event, various factors can hinder follow-through on collaborations and commitments.

Even though the DRAPAC23 event has concluded, our efforts are far from over. We will follow through on projects and collaborations, plan activities to carry forward the spirit of DRAPAC23, and co-create the DRAPAC Network. This ensures that the momentum generated during the event is sustained.

Follow-through on Projects and Collaborations

The full success of DRAPAC23 will depend on how well we follow through on its outcomes. In addition to the projects we executed, initiated, or planned during the Assembly, below are some collaborations that were sparked at DRAPAC23:

- As previously mentioned, #PushbackUNESCO has continued in other venues (Stockholm Internet Forum, RightsCon) and contributors continue to coordinate through the private chat group formed at DRAPAC23.
- During Doublethink Lab’s workshop in Manila, EngageMedia shared insights about the research project they were starting, including advice on and promotion of a call for a digital rights researcher.
- Tech Tales Youth will explore a potential collaboration with South Korean filmmakers.
- The Greater Internet Freedom program will pursue an initial action plan to build synchronisation of digital rights and digital safety work in South and Southeast Asia.
- EngageMedia’s Indonesia team is working with Indonesian civil society on electoral disinformation, Bangladeshi fact-checkers, Myanmar disinformation researchers, and Taiwanese researchers for the research project “The Politics of Fact-checking”.
- EngageMedia’s DR-TH project is working with 3 Thai independent media organisations on advocating for media freedom and providing digital security support.
- Following the alternative communication session, EngageMedia’s Myanmar team is working on an advocacy video aimed at garnering support and funding for finding solutions to alternative communication in Myanmar.
- Participants who are digital security trainers in South and Southeast Asia are planning to build a network to support each other through knowledge and resource sharing.
- EngageMedia is working with Citizen Lab on collecting and submitting data to improve malware detection systems, specifically for spyware like Pegasus.
- EngageMedia is exploring a potential collaboration with Irfan Toni Herlambang of 350.org, for during his sabbatical, as “an act of giving back to movement”. 
DRAPAC Statement of Solidarity

Before the Assembly, the DRAPAC Steering Committee planned on releasing a “DRAPAC23 Statement of Solidarity” during the closing ceremony. The statement was intended “to capture the spirit of the event, and acknowledge the diversity of the movement coming together and highlight the importance of digital rights,” and not to be a declaration, or a call to action, or a set of principles. Despite this disclaimer, a few participants expressed a desire to be more involved in its crafting. Thus, the DRAPAC23 team extended the period for inputs by four weeks.

On June 28, 2023, the DRAPAC23 Statement of Solidarity was published, with over 100 organisations and individuals signing the call for the greater protection of human rights in the digital age. Recognising the collective effort needed to address these urgent issues, the statement urges all stakeholders, including governments, technology companies, civil society organisations, and individuals, to work together in protecting and promoting digital rights and freedoms for all.
DRAPAC24 and Other Events

Throughout the latter part of the Assembly, one of the most common feedback we received from participants came in the form of a question: “So when/where is DRAPAC24?” While a DRAPAC24 is not assured, such feedback is nevertheless heartening. One participant expressed their anticipation by saying, “I look forward to future DRAPAC conferences and eagerly anticipate the opportunity to join again.”

While indeed a possibility, DRAPAC24 is not the only one. As the DRAPAC23 convenor, EngageMedia has also discussed more modest convenings such as country-based ones (similar to the 2022 Country Forums) or ones focused on specific themes: disinformation, artificial intelligence, digital authoritarianism, and other key issues identified by participants.

Post-DRAPAC23, many expressed a desire to see a concerted effort in localising resources pertaining to digital security and privacy, which could be pivotal in heightening awareness at the grassroots level.

Which events we ultimately organise to follow DRAPAC23 will depend on several factors: which issues emerge or become more salient, which kind of events funders express increased interest in, and which kinds of needs and collaborations emerge from the nascent DRAPAC Network.

DRAPAC Network

One of our primary objectives in hosting DRAPAC23 was launching the DRAPAC Network. We originally planned to already have members joining the Network by the end of the Assembly. But through conversations at various venues, we heard that participants wanted more time to deliberate before they could commit to joining.

We have listened to these concerns. We have emphasised that “joining DRAPAC” at this point did not mean joining a fully-formed organisation, complete with a charter, bylaws, and a code of conduct. At this early stage, in signing up, people will join the initial group that will co-create the founding governance structure and rules.

While the details have yet to be determined, what we know now is that the majority of participants agree there is value in having a DRAPAC Network. During the DRAPAC Network Co-creation Session, 91% of participants agreed to wanting to be part of this network (see poll results below).
Although we got some sense through breakout sessions, teasing out exactly what this means in practice will take more time. The DRAPAC Steering Committee has since met to get into specifics of working together as a committee and with the DRAPAC23 participants (and others) who want to join the co-creation process.

In a post-DRAPAC23 survey, participants suggested having a foundational agreement that outlines criteria for membership, shared values, ground rules, conflict resolution mechanisms, and decision-making structures. Participants also emphasised the importance of inclusivity in the network design, encouraging smaller organisations and marginalised groups to join. Participants further proposed a collaborative, non-hierarchical governance structure that promotes shared responsibility and empowers members.

Co-creating, convening, and collaborating with the DRAPAC Network is a crucial part of our plan to sustain the successes of DRAPAC23. When exactly the DRAPAC Network is fully formed, what exact shape it takes and what kind of mission it has—these details are just as important as integrating the values of solidarity, inclusivity, and diversity into each step of the process. When it comes to the DRAPAC Network, it is as much about the journey as it is the destination.
Sticky notes from a breakout group session on the value of the DRAPAC Network.
Challenges and Lessons

Planning DRAPAC23 was challenging due to its scale and complexity. Balancing ambitious goals with limited resources was difficult, so we established a structured planning process that fostered collaboration and transparency. By proactively addressing potential issues, we overcame hurdles and delivered a successful event.

During the planning and execution of DRAPAC23, we anticipated security and safety concerns. We established a Safety and Security Sub-committee, and co-created comprehensive safety and privacy guidelines. By involving various stakeholders, we were able to create protocols and guidelines that ensured a secure environment for all participants. This experience taught us the importance of prioritising participant safety and security in event planning, and we will continue to enhance our safety protocols for future events.

Participants identified a set of challenges which led to several key lessons. Overlapping sessions, tight timelines, last-minute changes resulted in difficulty choosing sessions, a need for more transition time, and limited opportunities for networking. Accessibility also posed problems, as multiple venues and technical issues for remote attendees created barriers. Moreover, the use of excessive plastic packaging was a concern. These highlight the need for improved organisation, clear communication, and efficient logistics. By ensuring close venue proximity, enhancing technical support, and reducing plastic usage, we can create a more environmentally friendly, accessible, and fulfilling experience for all participants.

Adaptability in managing last-minute changes was also key. As a large-scale event, DRAPAC23 required flexibility in responding to unforeseen circumstances. However, accommodating out-of-ordinary requests can disrupt the event flow. We learned the importance of balancing flexibility with maintaining a core structure to the event, clearly defining boundaries for changes, and effectively communicating compromises to manage expectations.

Finally, managing participant support and experience presented its own set of challenges. Streamlining registration processes, handling participant data, addressing health concerns, and providing adequate support required careful coordination and planning. We established a dedicated grievance redressal mechanism to address any concerns or issues raised by participants promptly. Volunteers were assigned to assist participants, providing them with information and guidance throughout the event. We also ensured the presence of dedicated security staff to maintain a safe and secure environment. Additionally, we developed clear guidelines to facilitate participant support and create a smooth event experience.
DRAPAC23

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