<center>**epicenter.works' Oral Intervention**</center>

<center>**Delivered by Sebastian Kneidinger on behalf of epicenter.works**
Second Informal Consultation – 1st of March 2024</center>

Dear Excellencies, Sirs and Madams,

I speak on behalf of the Austrian digital rights NGO epicenter.works, which is involved in the negotiations on the UN Convention on Cybercrime as well as in the initiative of the UN Tech Envoy (UNTE) for the creation of Universal Safeguards for digital public infrastructures. We will focus with this intervention on the latter issue.

Starting from the premise that human rights apply universally, both offline and online, we welcome the aspirations of the Global Digital Compact (GDC). But at the same time, we urge to also take into account the enormous risks the deployment of digital public infrastructures can bring. Too often the focus is only on the supposed positive economic and societal benefits that these systems are supposed to bring.

Without conditions like the rule of law, regulatory oversight and high data protection safeguards in both technology and administrative procedures, these systems of digital public infrastructure are at risk of becoming an infrastructure of total control and social exclusion. A platform where all elements of our online and offline lifes are transacted needs to be held to the highest human rights standards. Without equality and inclusivitiy the problems of the digital divide will become magnified on an unprecedented scale.

Digital public infrastructures aim to be inter-operable and global. Therefore the task of making them tools that foster the SDGs, rather than undermine them is one that we as citizens can only rely on the United Nations to achieve. The problem is too big for any one country.

Since UN bodies actively promote digital public infrastructures, it is also the job of the UN to ensure they are safe. This includes the development of metrics and measurement instruments to ensure their effect on the ground is not contrary to human rights and undermines the SDGs. It should be a warning shot for the United Nations when national high courts and civil society intervene against digital public infrastructures, like it happened in Kenya or India. When the UN is promoting technologies it has not properly understood that it undermines trust and credibility in the international system.

The recent adoption of the eIDAS Regulation in the European Union shows how safeguards for digital public infrastructures can be enshrined in law. This may be one of the many puzzle pieces that we hope the DPI Safeguards initiative of the UN Tech Envoy can compile into the framework needed before digital public infrastructures are safe to be promoted globally.

We will provide written comments to this process and remain at your disposal.
Thank you for your attention.