



38th International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners, Marrakech, Morocco

17 October 2016

Opening remarks by the Chair, John Edwards

Marhaban, Bienvenue, Welcome.

My name is John Edwards, and I am the Chair of the Executive Committee of this Conference and it is my very great pleasure to welcome you to this 38th International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners.

The Committee that has brought you this Conference is made up of New Zealand, Canada, France, The Netherlands, and of course Morocco.

It has genuinely been a group effort, but I want to make special mention of the contribution that Canada has made, in committing resources to enable such an informed panel of speakers to be convened under the moderation of Professor Ian Kerr, who you will meet in a moment.

I of course need also to particularly acknowledge the patient and tireless efforts of our Moroccan hosts, the CNDP.

A lot has happened since we last convened in Amsterdam. New laws to promote privacy and data protection have been passed in a host of countries. Hundreds of millions of data generating sensors have been deployed in domestic and industrial products, and by governments and municipal authorities.

All the indices of data generation and use continue to climb. And the rise of data based enterprise continues. The world's fastest growing taxi company Uber, never has to fill up a gas tank, the biggest accommodation provider, AirBNB does not own a single pillow. AliBaba, a market place for traders, is set to become the fifth largest economy in the world. The common thread of all these businesses is data.

And every day there are new stories in the media. Insecure platforms, data breaches, phishing scams, identity theft, new complaints and regulatory actions commenced by consumer protection, data protection, and privacy commissioners. And every day there are new issues for us to think about and respond to. Why did it take Yahoo 2 years to find out

about a hack that compromised the personal data of 500 million customers, probably affecting people from every jurisdiction represented here?

And while we are on the topic of Yahoo, did they write a script to allow all emails coming to or going from a yahoo address to be scanned for a particular set of characters? If so, under what legal authority?

These questions have never been more prominent in our own countries. What we do, has never been more relevant.

The OECD Ministerial on the Digital Economy in Cancun earlier this year agreed that they would “Develop privacy and data protection strategies at the highest level of government that incorporate a whole-of-society perspective while providing the flexibility needed to take advantage of digital technologies for the benefit of all; and support the development of international arrangements that promote effective privacy and data protection across jurisdictions, including through interoperability among frameworks”.

Many of us who were working in this field in the 1990s worked in relative isolation. When we tried to explain what we do at parties, we were met with puzzled looks. Today privacy and data protection are on the agendas of Boards, the media, civil society and politicians from across the political spectrum.

There is no better time to be working in this area, and no better or more challenging time for us to have the jobs with which we have been entrusted. Our Conference, which has been our meeting place for nearly 40 years has never been more vital as a forum for exchanging ideas, learning about the latest developments, and advancing the privacy interests of our citizens.

For this reason I welcome the French proposal that we will discuss tomorrow, to begin a conversation about the future strategic development of our Conference. You have two papers, one from CNIL, and one from my office which approach the issues in a slightly different way. I urge you to read those and to contribute your views to the conversation, and the subsequent process.

That conversation will play out over some months. Whatever the outcome, I hope we will continue to be inclusive, and continue with the theme this conference suggests, of “Opening New Territories for Privacy”.

In the shorter term, we have prepared what we hope will be a stimulating programme for you. Two years ago I attended my first Conference as Privacy Commissioner. I had only recently discovered the term “the internet of things”. At that Conference we were exposed to ideas and research that have allowed me to confidently respond to media queries, and occasionally to even sound like I know what I’m talking about.

I am similarly ignorant of the impact that Artificial intelligence, and robotics will have on our society, and what we need to do to prepare for it. By the end of today I am confident that I will at least be able to fake it with the best of them!

Likewise, encryption is a word we see in daily dispatches, and I, like many of you, will have taken an “in principle” position. Just last week I was on a panel in Bucharest speaking on the topic “why backdoors to encryption are a bad idea”, but how much do we really understand? Lets see.

We have tried to put together a stimulating programme for you, but ultimately the success of our conference depends on what you bring to it. I urge you to take advantage of the “closed” nature of our day and half together, to contribute to the discussions and debates, and to ask the questions that you think seem too obvious. I can guarantee many of your colleagues will thank you.

So lets take full advantage of the experts we have here, and maximise our opportunity to get ahead of these cutting edge and vital issues.

Please enjoy.