During the 1980s in an increasingly militarised world and in the face of a proliferation of nuclear weapons a number of people networks emerged to connect activists. They had experience in international collaboration in the non-profit world and a deep commitment to making advances in communications available to movements working to make the world a better place.  

In 1987 people at later APC member GreenNet in the United Kingdom began collaborating with their counterparts later known as the Institute for Global Communications (IGC) in the United States. By coincidence the two national networks were using the same computer systems. They made the first non-profit transoceanic computer link. Communications focused on peace, human rights and the environment. By 1989 networks in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Nicaragua and Sweden were exchanging information with each other and with IGC and GreenNet. In May 1990 these seven organisations founded the Association for Progressive Communications to coordinate the operation and development of this emerging global network of networks.

"Widening the user base to grassroots activists [...] was the priority of [APC]," said Viv Kendon, formerly of GreenNet. “We wanted to show what you could do with email – crisis response to rainforest logging is the most-quoted early success.”

Today APC remains committed to making the internet serve the needs of global civil society and working to ensure the internet is free and open.

3  www.apc.org/en/node/10678
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Powerful Sun computers are considered "military equipment".

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South Africa is still under apartheid rule.
The Institute for Global Communications (IGC) is formed to manage PeaceNet and EcoNet, the world’s first computer network dedicated to peace, environmental preservation and sustainability.

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Mitra Ardron defines the central characteristic of the "typical APC network user" as "a commitment to a future for the planet that works a lot better than the present."

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From apartheid South Africa to Asian ecologists, from peace activists in San Francisco to women’s groups working in Eastern Europe, the online conferences make it easier and cheaper to inform and take action worldwide.

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Collapse of Soviet Union
South Africa begins to repeal apartheid laws.
War in the Balkans breaks out.

1992
Eastern European NGOs are desperate to connect with one another and abroad, but costs are prohibitive.

1993
The World Bank cancels plans to fund the controversial Namada Dam in India after activists organise throughout India and beyond using APC conferences.

APC nodes encouraged by Jagdish Parikh establish AsiaLink to provide start-up funding and technical support to small hosts in Asia working with social movements.

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Nelson Mandela elected president of South Africa.

APC networks provide over 17,000 email accounts (an organisation usually shared one email address) and 94 countries are using APC networks.

1995

NGOs use the internet in preparation for the 1995 UN World Summit for Social Development at a time when Bill Gates says “we have nothing to win from the internet.”

Over 50 email hosts in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Caribbean are providing civil society organisations with email and e-information using the FidoNet gateways in London, Toronto and San Francisco. APC partners with the UN’s Sustainable Development Networks Programme to extend these links even further into developing countries.

1997

APC’s mission is formalised in South Africa.

The first legal threat to freedom of information online. Two APC members in the UK and South Africa are threatened with legal action by transnational company Biwater for a news article in their online archives. Thirteen APC members mirror the threatened content.

1998

APC provides email and other e-services at UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

APC receives consultative (Category 1) status to the UN.

1999

Many women’s rights activists get their first email training in Beijing from a 40-woman APC team from 25 countries, many from the South. It is a powerful message to the world – there is no innate barrier to women using computer technology.

2000

APC WNSP co-coordinates WomenAction 2000 to bring an NGO perspective to the UN Beijing+5 review. They survey 1,000 respondents online to produce a strongly worded NGO declaration. Official declarations promote ICT as a way of enhancing NGO participation in global policy making.

2001

Turning point for the “new economy” and the crash of the internet hype.

Internet censorship and government preoccupation with “cybersecurity” mount.

The first APC Africa Hafkin Prize is won by the Fantsuam Foundation, a small microcredit scheme which goes on to be a key reference in Nigeria.

2002

New vision statement for APC: “APC works to achieve a world in which all people have easy, equal and affordable access to the creative potential of the internet to improve their lives and create more democratic and egalitarian societies.”

APC organise first Internet Rights Charter. APC runs first ICT policy training workshops in Africa and India in the run-up to WSIS.

The first legal threat to freedom of information online. Two APC members in the UK and South Africa are threatened with legal action by Biwater for a news article in their online archives. Thirteen APC members mirror the threatened content.

The GenARDIS project brings small grants to improve agricultural initiatives by women through the better use of ICTs, eventually disbursing over €300,000 in direct seed grants over eight years.
APC begins training 100 technology enthusiasts in Africa to set up community wireless networks.

APC moves into specifically national policy advocacy in five countries using “network animators” to stimulate multi-stakeholder dialogue as part of the Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa (CATIA) programme.

Karen Banks and the APC WNSP are awarded the Anita Borg Prize for Social Impact.

2004

WSIS ends in discord as governments disagree on how to run the internet.

2005

The Tunisian government clamps down on freedom of expression and sabotages civil society events at WSIS. APC and partners enlist the support of foreign diplomats, secure high-profile exposure for local human rights advocates and denounce the attacks in the international press.

APC publishes an “ICT policy handbook for beginners” together with a trilingual ICT policy training for civil society curriculum with a section on advocacy for positive policy change.

2006

There is still no broadband fibre connectivity down the entire East African coast, and access is very expensive.

APC is nominated by peers to address post-WSIS deadlock. The resulting working group proposes the unique multi-stakeholder format of the Internet Governance Forum, allowing non-government people a voice in discussions like there is in no other UN-run space.

2007

APC women’s programme begins to focus on ITCs and violence against women. The change in strategy engages more women in the politics of ICT and deepens our understanding of how ICT policy affects women’s rights.

The first edition of the APC Internet Rights Charter is published and translated into 20+ languages.

Many Latin American and Caribbean countries elect left-wing governments which take more active roles in telecoms (as opposed to the liberalisation trends of the 90s).

The community wireless training developed in Africa is replicated in Latin America and the Caribbean, forming a lively eighteen-country network connecting indigenous communities, rural backwaters and impulsing university networking courses.

The world’s first Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) for ICT initiatives is published in English, Spanish, French and Arabic.
2008

Ecuador enshrines "communications rights" in the Constitution.

Survey identifies APC as the most relevant actor in Latin American ICT processes after the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC).

APC leads the preparation of proposals and lobbying of the Ecuadorian assembly ahead of the new Constitution.

First Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX) trains over 100 women’s rights activists.

First regional IGFs co-organised in East Africa in Kenya and in Latin America in Uruguay.

APC has trained people from 680 organisations in technology for social change and ICT policy since 2004.

A number of APC members who became involved in ICT policy during 2002-2005 have become key players in their countries.

UN talks on climate change at Copenhagen fall apart without agreement.

2010

Every 30 months the amount of information that can be transmitted over a wireless internet connection doubles.

APC carries out first-of-their-kind studies of the situation of violence against women and ICTs in twelve countries and how legislation or lack of it hinders or helps women.

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The government of the Dominican Republic chooses GEM as the tool to design and evaluate all their ICT policies. The DR is leading the gender and IT track in the regional eLAC2010 plan.

As a result of APC policy advocacy, Peruvian regulators force operators to drop plans to offer a two-tier internet for those who can and can’t pay.

The internet is frequently filtered or blocked in many parts of the world.

APC and partners publish a gender framework critical for research on filtering and security issues.

APC awards USD 240,000 in small grants to projects working to end violence against women using technology.

APC launches the “Connect Your Rights: Internet Rights are Human Rights” campaign, including a dedicated edition of GISWatch and a defence of human rights and women’s rights activists working online.

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