

UNHRC: Digital Freedom and the Right to Internet Access



Letters from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

My name is Rosha Anjomshoaa, and I am incredibly honoured and excited to serve as the chair for UNHCR: Digital Freedom and the Right to Internet Access. A little bit about me: this is my third year in Model UN, as I began my freshman year and I'm currently a senior. I love to play and watch soccer in my free time. I also love to travel when I'm off from school. Internet access and digital freedoms are issues that are deeply important to me. I believe that we are currently facing one of the biggest changes in the world, with the AI revolution and the use of digital tools to control populations, including by cutting them off from the free flow of information and services. The problems to be discussed in this committee are very new and currently affect a lot of lives. This topic is a bit broad, which provides space for creative ideas, new solutions, and plenty of diplomatic exchange. I'm excited to dig deep into the many aspects and vast range of solutions to these issues. With this in mind I'm thrilled for the long day of debate ahead, if you have any questions please email me at ranjomshoaa2027@ljcds.org.

Best,

Rosha Anjomshoaa

Hello Delegates,

My name is Rodolfo Cevallos-Fernandez, and I am delighted to co-chair UNHCR: Digital Freedom and the Right to Internet Access. I joined Model UN in 9th grade, so this is my third year with the team. This is my very first time chairing a committee, and I am honored to finally serve in this role. I love watching and playing sports, watching and making movies, reading, and spending time with my family. I believe internet freedom is a crucial topic to talk about, as we shift more and more to a more digital world. We must make sure that nobody is left behind in this fourth industrial revolution, and that everyone has safe and equal access to the internet. We must also find a way to, once again, make the internet a place for the good of the people, not a place of darkness and crime. I hope that you can all work together and come up with effective solutions, and are excited as I am for this conference! If you have any questions at all, don't hesitate to email me at rcfernandez2027@ljcds.org.

Sincerely,

Rodolfo Cevallos-Fernandez

Position Papers

- Length: 1 single-spaced page, not counting sources
- Format:
 - Background,
 - UN action,
 - country position/experience with this issue,
 - proposed solutions
- Style requirements: 12-pt font, Times New Roman, 1-inch margins, no headers or section breaks, no images
- Header:
 - Country
 - Committee
 - Name
 - School

Committee Expectations

This topic includes many different subjects and potential solutions to global problems. Please plan your notes accordingly and be ready to move from topic to topic. Since problems are specific to certain regions, we anticipate a lively debate in which a variety of solutions may be proposed. Some will benefit all Member States (MSs) while others may be regional or even specific to a type of state (such as Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)). We will begin by opening the speakers list so if you would like to prepare, plan accordingly. Additionally, we expect the highest standard of behavior and respect for everyone. We will not tolerate any misconduct of any kind.

Key Terms

Conditional Immunity: Individuals who violate local laws on online platforms may also be liable for their online activity. For example, theft online is a violation of laws against theft and may be punishable by law.

Least Developed Country (LDP): Nations that are at a very low development point

Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs): Nations with developing economies, often across a wide range of development.

Industry 4.0: The fourth industrial revolution

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): Market value of a country's productions of goods and services in a certain time period

Special Rapporteur: Expert on human rights appointed by the United Nations

World Wide Web (WWW): Global information system on the internet

Internet Service Provider (ISP): Company that provides internet services to the public

Introduction:

The internet emerged in the late 20th century, as a revolutionary technology on the forefront of foreign affairs. Its lasting implications affect the international community. Internet access and freedom is typically explained by two classifications. The first is Freedom of the Internet, which denotes the freedom of online expression, the right to privacy, and the right to access information. Second, Freedom *via* the Internet relates to new communication technologies that aid the establishment of democracy and a liberal society offline.¹ Although the connections between internet access and democracy are complex and indirect, evidence suggests that new technologies significantly affect political change. With the arrival of Covid-19, internet activity increased by 40%, with the majority of these people being located in developed nations.² As digital platforms increasingly integrate with societal functions, the protection of these rights has become necessary.

I. Background

As a result of internet access, the global population continues to interlink and connect as the human population gains access to more information than ever seen before. Globally, there are over 5 billion internet users, totalling to over 68% of the global population. Of this 68%, a little over 24% have free access to internet resources. However, 2.6 billion people remain offline, due

¹Clinton, Hillary Rodham. "Internet Freedom and Human Rights." *Issues in Science and Technology* 28, no. 3 (2012): 45–52. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43315669>.

²Clinton, Hillary Rodham. "Internet Freedom and Human Rights." *Issues in Science and Technology* 28, no. 3 (2012): 45–52. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43315669>.

to factors such as political instability and economic marginalization, causing a digital divide. Authoritarian regimes, fearful of the potentially liberating effects of an unsupervised web space, also threaten to restrict both access and use of the internet. The internet is constantly evolving. Due to this, threats to the internet change regularly, reflecting changes on the web itself. Both new threats and old limit access and privacy.

Lack of access poses a significant problem. The internet was mainly developed in the United States, due to this, access is broadest in developed nations such as the U.S. and the nations of Europe. Widespread use of the internet generates a series of problems for less developed nations such as the magnitude of infrastructure. Many developing nations and LEDCs lack the necessary technology or infrastructure to support widespread internet access. As a developing nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreases, the 2.5% average budget for technological infrastructure also decreases. This gap causes many problems, and loss of opportunities to address global challenges related to sustainable development. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), in most underdeveloped nations, a 10% increase in connectivity can improve children's years of schooling by 0.6% and increase that country's GDP per capita by 1.1%.³ This increase in per capita income, reflects the central role of digital education in fostering economic growth, and the quality of life for citizens. School-age children in sub-saharan Africa and South Asia are the most affected, with an average nine of ten children unconnected.⁴ The potential benefits for children in LEDCs and developing economies suggest

³Heather Johnson, "About 2.5 Billion People Lack Internet Access: How Connectivity Can Unlock Their Potential," World Economic Forum, September 25, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/09/2-5-billion-people-lack-internet-access-how-connectivity-can-unlock-their-potential/>.

⁴UNICEF, "Two Thirds of the World's School-Age Children Have No Internet Access at Home, New UNICEF-ITU Report Says," UNICEF, November 30, 2020,

that technological and infrastructure investment offers benefits both for the citizens of those Member States and for the global economic community as a whole.

Another major problem for developing nations, relates to individuals who lack disposable financial resources, making it more difficult to gain access. Over one-quarter of the world live below the UN-identified subsistence level of USD \$1.25 per day. The average internet connection costs 5-60 dollars USD depending on the region.⁵ Even if the price of connection was far lower, it would still be out of reach for poorer users. These connectivity numbers disregard the cost of the device and other technologies required to use the internet. High costs are due to many factors such as tele-communications provider monopolies and tech sector taxes. Monopolies reap huge profits by monetizing data at a large scale. Countries such as Mexico, South Africa, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Brazil tax mobile broadband and thus discourage internet usage and access.⁶ These “connectivity taxes” and additional fees increase the cost of mobile services. Any increase in cost erects a significant barrier to underserved communities where cost is a major factor.⁷ Similarly, many countries impose per-user fees on mobile operators, in turn discouraging them from investing in services for unconnected communities.⁸ Cost factors, continue to create a major problem to unconnected communities, and in turn diminish the access to internet resources, that could help those communities to reach a higher level of economic development.

⁵ Darrell West, “West Internet Access,” 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/West_Internet-Access.pdf.

⁶ Darrell West, “West Internet Access,” 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/West_Internet-Access.pdf.

⁷ Darrell West, “West Internet Access,” 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/West_Internet-Access.pdf.

⁸ Darrell West, “West Internet Access,” 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/West_Internet-Access.pdf.

The battle for access continues every day by organizations such as UNICEF and ITU. The latter, for example, launched Giga, a global initiative to connect as many schools as possible and its surrounding community to the internet. Working alongside governments, Giga has mapped over 800,000 schools in 30 different countries. Giga uses this data to work with governments, the civil sector, and private sector partners. Its success creates a compelling case for public-private funding in order to subsidize the infrastructure needed to deploy digital learning services.⁹

Lack of universally coherent internet content regulations adds another challenge to internet access; for many liberal and democratic nations freedom of expression is constitutionally or legally protected. As regulated by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19), and also recognized as a fundamental right under Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights, freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that crosses boundaries of national identity, race, religion, region, class, gender, and even age. Self-expression, as seen in the multimedia revolution, expanded in scope and complexity following this technological age. The results have affected numerous aspects of global economics, politics, and law. Internet access policies both relate the right to information and to opportunities for cultural, religious, political, and social expression. The absence of coherent internet regulation means not only a barrier to economic growth, but also to free expression.

Changes to internet regulation and rules related to access and expression inevitably cause tensions in the delicate balance among fundamental freedoms. In recent years there have been many attempts by nations to regulate and control content and information on the internet. Such

⁹UNICEF, “Two Thirds of the World’s School-Age Children Have No Internet Access at Home, New UNICEF-ITU Report Says,” UNICEF, November 30, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/two-thirds-worlds-school-age-children-have-no-internet-access-home-new-unicef-itu>.

controversies include SOPA and PIPA proposals discussed by the United States, or the HAPODI legislation adopted in France.¹⁰ Prior to these attempts at internet regulation, many nations took a conditional liability approach to content posted on online platforms. Conditional liability reflects an impulse to avoid internet-specific regulation by applying existing law to web-based activities. This approach recognizes both that crimes that pre-date the internet can occur online and that the internet is a public space that contains similar activities to those in face-to-face life. Thus, it should be subject to the legal codes of the geographies where its users live. However, recently many countries are beginning to shift towards a conditional *immunity* approach. Under some circumstances, conditional immunity offers changes to the law when an act takes place online.

The Internet as a Human Right

The first ever official mention of the internet as a human right came in 2011, when UN Special Rapporteur Frank La Rue stated that people had the right to the internet's content and physical access to the internet.¹¹ At this point in time, the internet had been in the world for a long time, the earliest iterations all the way back in the 1950s. It was created as a new form of communication between government researchers in the United States during the Cold War, and

¹⁰ On SOPA and PIPA, see "Regulating the Internet Ten Years after the SOPA/PIPA Blackout," Georgetown Law Center, 2022, <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/tech-institute/news/regulating-the-internet-ten-years-after-the-sopa-pipa-blackout/>. On HAPODI, see Primavera De Filippi & Danièle Bourcier, "'Three-Strikes' Response to Copyright Infringement: The Case of HADOPI," in *The Turn to Infrastructure in Internet Governance* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), p. 125-152. Accessed July, 2025, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137483591_7. It is amusing to note that the designers of HAPODI apparently pirated their logo, despite their stated purpose of controlling online pirating.

¹¹ A.HRC.17.27_EN.PDF, accessed May 30, 2025, https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf.

went on to grow into something for the whole world.¹² The internet expanded with the creation of the World Wide Web in 1989, introducing limitless possibilities for the public to explore.¹³

However, not all of humanity enjoys the opportunity to access the internet. LEDCs such as the Central African Republic, Burundi, and South Sudan have very limited internet access, with less than 2,000 users in the whole country.¹⁴ Citizens of conflict zones often find their access limited, as well. People living in nations with repressive regimes struggle to access basic internet services and rarely enjoy free expression online. The United Nations reported on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in 2021 regarding their internet access. In 2018, the United Nations gave these LDCs a deadline to increase internet access in their nations. Unfortunately, only two nations met the deadline: Bangladesh and Bhutan. Additionally, the United Nations has found that there are people in these LDCs that have access to the internet, yet choose to not use it. There are two causes to this: lack of education on the technology and not being able to afford the devices to use the internet.

There is still hope, however, as the United Nations found that not all the countries are struggling at the same rate, and that some of the LDCs and LEDCs are on track to reach higher internet access by the end of the decade. But the situation will keep getting harder as populations grow rapidly and conditions that inhibit internet freedoms exacerbate.¹⁵ Because of this, the UN in its various bodies and a range of member states have urged the international community to establish access to the internet as a human right. Citizens of Member States should have access

¹² “A Short History of the Internet,” National Science and Media Museum, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/short-history-internet>.

¹³ “The World Wide Web,” MIT for a Better World, May 12, 2017, <https://betterworld.mit.edu/world-wide-web/>.

¹⁴ “Countries with Poor (or Limited) Internet Access 2025,” worldpopulationreview.com, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-without-internet>.

¹⁵ “Connectivity in the Least Developed Countries: Status Report 2021 | Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States,” United Nations, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/news/connectivity-least-developed-countries-status-report-21>.

to the internet and to the information within the internet. People must be able to rely on the information they find, and people must be kept safe from dangers online.

Internet crime emerged within a handful of years after the internet opened to the general public in 1989. Chris Lamprecht was the first man banned from the internet in 1995, for money laundering, introducing crime to the internet. Right away, the U.S. government acted to combat crime online. Congress passed The Electronics Communication Transactional Records Act and the Child Pornography Prevention Act.¹⁶ This effort and others like it around the world, reflected the conviction that safety for people on the internet is a crucial part of having the internet be a human right. Part of a well-regulated, free internet is the sunlight of law enforcement and shared norms. So long as the internet is a third space, it can be manipulated or exploited and its users will be vulnerable. One challenge facing those committed to internet freedom is the question of safety in web spaces.

Similarly, the information the people consume online must be accurate and available. Countries like China and Russia believe in heavy censorship online, blocking outside media and keeping their populations controlled. Additionally, Russia and China were also among the nations that opposed the declaration of the internet as a human right. Other countries, like Indonesia and India, also opposed viewing the internet as a human right.¹⁷ China is famous for their “Great Firewall,” aiming to keep out information that the Chinese government deems undesirable for their people. It began with the restriction of anti-Communist media, but it has now turned into something more extreme, fueling anger from citizens.¹⁸ Russia also implemented censorship of outside media, sparking protests from the Russian public to “free the internet.”

¹⁶ “Internet Free Expression Timeline,” National Coalition Against Censorship, April 16, 2025, <https://ncac.org/resource/a-selective-timeline-of-the-internet-and-censorship>.

¹⁷ Ted Piccone et al., “The Internet as a Human Right,” Brookings, March 9, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-internet-as-a-human-right/>.

¹⁸ “In China, the ‘great Firewall’ Is Changing a Generation,” Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/01/china-great-firewall-changing-generation>.

Russia even has a law requiring internet service providers (ISPs) to install apparatus that allow the Russian government to surveil online activity.¹⁹ And the situation has worsened now with the Russia-Ukraine War, as they block any media supporting Ukraine, manipulating their citizens through the internet to keep them on their side. Any support for Ukraine, expressed in Russia, will be met with criminal punishment.²⁰ Russian and Chinese oversight and restriction of human rights surprises no one familiar with the history of the internet or of those nations' domestic politics. Their approach to internet freedom suggests the urgency of a UN-led discussion about digital liberties. If the globe divides into member states where the internet is freely and widely available and member states where it is virtually nonexistent or a tool of the state, then the potential for the internet to help build a global community will be lost.

The struggle to establish the internet as a human right has also led to bigger troubles out of the online world. What is being fought for as a human right has come to be used as a form of warfare. And used as a form of warfare by the same countries who attempt to regulate and control online spaces. Recently, Russia has unleashed cyber attacks on the world in order to sabotage and spy on foreign governments. And they have also targeted pro-Ukraine organizations since the start of their war against Ukraine.²¹ China has also unleashed cyberattacks, primarily because of the tension with Taiwan and the United States.²² Countries like the U.S. have acknowledged the internet as a human right, but it appears that even in those countries online surveillance and government intervention extends beyond the regulation of

¹⁹ "Russia: Growing Internet Isolation, Control, Censorship," Human Rights Watch, September 23, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/18/russia-growing-internet-isolation-control-censorship>.

²⁰ Yuliya Parshina-Kottas Anton Troianovski, "How the Russian Government Silences Wartime Dissent (Published 2023)," The New York Times, January 13, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/12/29/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-censorship.html>.

²¹ "Russian Military Cyber Actors Target US and Global Critical Infrastructure: CISA," Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency CISA, May 21, 2025, <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/cybersecurity-advisories/aa24-249a>.

²² Gaby Tejeda, "China Strategically Infiltrates U.S. Critical Infrastructure as Cyberattacks Escalate," The Soufan Center, January 10, 2025, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-january-10/>.

internet crime and often includes propaganda and punishment for citizens who speak out in ways the government dislikes.²³ Even in ways limited by national interests, as in the USA and other member states, this new human right has yet to reach many LEDCs and LDPs. However, the Special Rapporteur stated that the implementation of the internet as a human right would be a very long and hard process, and said that physical access to the internet should be prioritized over internet expression and content.²⁴ It will take time, patience, resources, skill, and empathy, to secure the internet as a free space for all global citizens. The United Nations has the power to declare the internet as a human right, but it is ultimately up to individual nations to step up and provide the necessary steps in order to achieve giving this right to the people. As we are well into Industry 4.0, it is expected that this issue will be resolved.

The Threat to Journalism

A free, diverse press is directly associated with a functioning democracy. The press sustains democracy by shedding light to human rights violations: torture, discrimination, corruption, or misuse of power. Press freedom is protected by both national, and international law, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). Press freedom around the world has begun eroding, with a clear acceleration in recent times as hundreds of journalists and photographers

²³ Dawn Lurie & Leon Rodriguez, “Crossing Back Into the U.S.? Expect Eyes on Your Devices,” Through the Immigration Lens, Seyfarth LLC, April 16, 2025, accessed July 2025, <https://www.throughtheimmigrationlens.com/2025/04/crossing-back-into-the-u-s-expect-eyes-on-your-devices/>. See also US Customs and Border Protection, “Border Search of Electronic Devices at Ports of Entry,” <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/cbp-search-authority/border-search-electronic-devices>.

²⁴ “‘UN Declares Internet Access a Human Right’ – Did It Really?,” *Diplo*, April 5, 2024, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/un-declares-internet-access-human-right-did-it-really/>.

have been killed, injured, kidnapped, and threatened.²⁵ According to UNESCO research, 73% of women journalists surveyed said they had been threatened, intimidated, and insulted in direct correlation with their work.²⁶ This figure reflects a broader pattern of hostility toward the press especially when reporting on sensitive topics. Reporting on subjects such as gang violence, terrorism, state corruption or human right abuse.

Alongside violent approaches, legal systems are often weaponized to target journalists. Laws such as Sedition, defamation, cybercrime, anti-terrorism, and national security are among the most weaponized, to detain and prosecute journalists.²⁷ Although there are many examples of laws used to restrict freedom of expression and target journalists, there is very little legislation made to enable and protect journalists. Government employed surveillance and monitoring, are often used as intimidation to silence journalists. Measures by states and governments to clamp down on privacy tools such as encryption and anonymity are also undermining the ability of journalists to report securely and freely, as this allows governments to circumvent censorship and avoid surveillance. In more authoritarian regimes, state-sponsored censorship and propaganda with government-aligned outlets is used to downplay the press. Government bodies thus deploy counterfeit forms of media in order to control their national image or messaging. With more government control, brutality against journalists, and defunding of media outlets, the decline in press freedom becomes a threat to freedom of expression, alongside democracy.

Even in regimes or cultures in which democracy is not a fundamental value, community standards, economic exchange, and the basic human rights of citizens include the right to the free exchange of information and expression. The UN accepts a wide range of governmental systems

²⁵ Nils Muižnieks, “The Alarming Situation of Press Freedom in Europe,” Commissioner for Human Rights, November 25, 2014,

²⁶ UNESCO, “Threats to Freedom of Press: Violence, Disinformation & Censorship | UNESCO,” www.unesco.org, May 30, 2022,

²⁷ Nighat Dad and Shmyla Khan, “THREATS against JOURNALISTS Digital Rights Foundation,” November 20, 2020,

as legitimate. It welcomes discourse related to the best interests of citizens and member states. It also insists upon, and its membership has agreed to uphold, standards of liberty for all peoples. Those standards include the right to a discourse that includes objections, observations, and analysis. Freedom of the press, including online, supports those standards.

II. Past Actions of the UN

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was implemented by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on December 10, 1948, in Paris, France. The declaration has thirty articles, including Article 19 which enforces freedom of expression and opinion.²⁸ In 1993, faced with the Yugoslav Wars, the end of the Cold War, and conflict between Israel and Palestine, the UN revisited the UDHR. In addition to a wave of global conflict, the UN sought to integrate the 1948 Declaration with modern technology and events. Action was desperately needed during this time, to protect millions of people around the world. A Special Rapporteur from the United Nations Commission of Human Rights (UNCHR) established a mandate that year, calling for enforcement of human rights, both off and online.²⁹ In 2006, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights became the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).³⁰ It continues to seek solutions to global problems related to Human Rights, including those which touch on the initial Declaration and the 1993 mandate.

In 2011, a joint declaration by the UNHRC, along with the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), Organization of American States (OAS), and African

²⁸United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” December 10, 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

²⁹ Special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression | ohchr, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-freedom-of-opinion-and-expression>.

³⁰ “A Rough Guide to the Human Rights Council,” Image, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.universal-rights.org/human-rights-rough-guides/a-rough-guide-to-the-human-rights-council/#:~:text=The%20Council%20was%20created%20on,its%20membership%20and%20perceived%20politicisation>.

Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), asserted that freedom of expression and opinion was also applicable to the internet. The declaration called for education related to: misinformation, blocking of harmful websites, and promoting internet access for underrepresented groups.³¹ That same year, Frank La Rue, the Special Rapporteur, submitted a report to the HRC. This marked the first-ever official recognition of the internet as a human right. His report called for freedom to access the content within the internet itself, and freedom to the physical right to get access to the internet.³² In addition, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights offers clear guidelines to businesses and government entities regarding the necessary protection of access and liberty of expression on the internet.³³ Its three pillars are “protect, respect, and remedy,” offering a framework for nations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) seeking a way to define solutions to the problem of internet freedom.

The most important step the United Nations has taken came in 2016. The UNGA declared that having access to and having freedom on the internet was now a human right, added to Article 19 on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, countries like Russia, India, and others oppose having the internet as a human right. Instead, for reasons of national sovereignty and domestic control, they push for state oversight of the media.³⁴ Recently, violence and persecution against journalists online has increased worldwide, especially against women. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 73% of female journalists faced threats and online violence in 2020, and 20% of those women

³¹ OAS :: Special rapporteurship for freedom of expression, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/showarticle.asp?artID=26>.

³² A.HRC.17.27_EN.PDF, accessed May 30, 2025, https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf.

³³ “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,” UNHCR, 2011, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf.

³⁴ Ted Piccone et al., “The Internet as a Human Right,” Brookings, March 9, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-internet-as-a-human-right/>.

experienced offline violence that originated in online threats.³⁵ During the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021, another resolution passed. On July 13, 2021, the resolution on “the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet” strengthened UN recognition of the internet as a human right. This resolution emphasized digital divide, especially during the pandemic, calling on industry to promote more affordable connectivity for the public. It also condemned governments who engaged in internet shutdowns and censorship. This was also the first resolution to address net neutrality, meaning that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should treat all internet traffic equally. The resolution also called for better encryption, to protect peoples’ identities online.³⁶

In 2023, the United Nations reported that the internet had become “fertile ground for those seeking to sow disinformation and conspiracy theories,” no longer a place where people feel comfortable in getting accurate information. Authoritarian nations like Russia seek to take full control of media on and offline, and the UN warns that the complete elimination of Democracy will follow.³⁷ The introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools that can fake the faces and voices of world leaders, create realistic images, and produce convincing - but incorrect - news reports adds to the problem.³⁸ Additionally, cybercrime has been on the rise, threatening the public’s safety on and offline. On December 24, 2024, the UN adopted a new convention called the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime. The United Nations Office on Drugs

³⁵ “UNESCO’s Global Survey on Online Violence Against Women Journalists,” UNESCO.org, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unescos-global-survey-online-violence-against-women-journalists>.

³⁶ “UN: Human Rights Council Adopts Resolution on Human Rights on the Internet,” ARTICLE 19, August 11, 2021, <https://www.article19.org/resources/un-human-rights-council-adopts-resolution-on-human-rights-on-the-internet/>.

³⁷ “Freedom of the Press under Attack Worldwide | UN News,” United Nations, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136272>.

³⁸ Alla Polishchuk, “AI Poses Risks to Both Authoritarian and Democratic Politics,” The Russia File, The Wilson Center, January 26, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/ai-poses-risks-both-authoritarian-and-democratic-politics>; Raluca Csernatonu, “Can Democracy Survive the Disruptive Power of AI?,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 18, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/12/can-democracy-survive-the-disruptive-power-of-ai?lang=en>.

and Crime (UNODC) will be in charge of negotiations. This convention will help combat money laundering, sexual abuse, scams, and countless other crimes online.³⁹ Further, the UN Office for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) revised its guidelines (originally composed in 1976) for multinational corporations in 2023 to address some areas of internet freedom. In the revised guidelines, the OECD specifically pointed to due diligence areas of practice as essential focal points for businesses to ensure that they are not participating in or supporting any efforts that relate to the restriction of internet freedoms. This is notable in areas like data collection and the intrusion into internet spaces by governments. The UN acknowledges that the internet is a place where commerce and politics merge. That overlapping purpose means that governments alone cannot ensure internet freedoms. Corporations must also participate in finding solutions that protect the liberties of citizens in Member States.⁴⁰

This committee seeks solutions, big and small, that can assist in defending the internet as a place of daily life, commerce, communication, protest, information delivery, disaster warning and management of art, and culture. Delegates, working together can forge partnerships that protect the interests of all participants in the emerging global culture of the internet.

³⁹ “UN General Assembly Adopts Landmark Convention on Cybercrime,” United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2024/December/un-general-assembly-adopts-landmark-convention-on-cybercrime.html>.

⁴⁰ “OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct,” UN Office for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/06/oecd-guidelines-for-multinational-enterprises-on-responsible-business-conduct_a0b49990/81f92357-en.pdf.

III. Bloc Positions

Western Liberal Democracies

- United States
- Canada
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Switzerland
- a. Strong advocates for digital freedom
- b. Tend to view digital freedom as an extension of civil liberties and human rights
- c. Emphasize global cooperation for other nations but tend to privilege their own national interests behind the scenes

Authoritarian and Surveillance Oriented States

- China
- Russia
- Iran
- India
- North Korea
- a. Emphasis on *Cyber Sovereignty*, asserting that each government should have the right to monitor media access
- b. justify censorship
- c. National interests over global cooperation

Developing Nations

- Brazil
- Mexico
- Nigeria
- Kenya
- Bangladesh
- a. United by the imperative of closing the digital divide
- b. Cautious approach to regulations that balance economic interests with social concerns
- c. Serious concern, driven by protection of their emerging economic strength, about economic exploitation by MEDCs

Multinational Corporations

- Google
- Meta
- Alphabet
- Amazon
- a. Cross national, cultural, and political boundaries
- b. Answerable to shareholders
- c. Resist regulation and oversight by any government or NGO

IV. Questions to Consider

As you begin further researching your country's position and possible solutions to address the problem some questions to consider are:

1. Should access to the internet be officially recognized as a human right?
2. What obligations do member states have to ensure access is equitable and ethical?
3. Will new safety measures be put in place to keep people safe from harm online and offline?
4. What measures should be taken to ensure Freedom of Expression?
5. What role should the United Nations take in regulating digital media?
6. How should the UNHRC respond to violations of digital freedom, such as shutdowns, censorship, and surveillance?

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