



BACKGROUND PAPER:

UN General Assembly Sixth Committee ***Internet Access as a Human Right***

INTRODUCTION:

Marked by remarkable, revolutionary uprisings in the Middle East, 2011 has seen the use and need for social media grow to new heights. These uprisings were facilitated and documented through Twitter, Facebook, and other social media. Threatened by these resources, governments in Egypt and Syria tried to control the flow of information from citizens by blocking Internet access and other forms of communication. Worldwide perception of these actions was that they were sinister and cruel. The people lost their voice and those outside the Middle East were blinded.

This has caused people to beg the question, how vital is Internet access to society? Has it reached the status of a basic need like clean water and electricity? The Internet as a resource provides people with a broad spectrum of information and news on demand and entertainment at a single click; all of this, available in greater quantities at greater speeds than ever thought possible. With its extravagant growth potential and the incredible opportunities it provides, the Internet's status as a vital human right has come into question.

HISTORY/BACKGROUND:

UN Secretary General, Frank La Rue, calls the Internet “an indispensable tool for realizing a range of human rights, combating inequality, and accelerating development and human progress.” According to the World Bank’s international infrastructure statistics, in the early 1990s, there were 0.3 Internet users for every 100 people. Today, that figure has reached 27.1 per 100. In the United States, among those who get their news online, 75 percent receive their news via email or posts on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter; 52 percent share news links with others via those sites. Such statistics suggest that those lacking Internet access are missing out, not only on sharing their own voices but also on being able to learn about and interact with their communities and the world. These statistics only cover the United States, which is a lot better off than most nations and the concept of Internet access as a human right is not practiced even there.



CURRENT SITUATION:

While many around the globe are fortunate enough to have public access to free Wi-Fi, the service is limited. Waiting for a computer often times requires waiting in long lines. Free outdoor Wi-Fi is often in a very limited radius or of spotty quality. In some areas, Internet connection is far too expensive to be attained by the public. This is true even in the United States as broadband-access fees are currently higher in the US than in Europe or the Asia-Pacific region, according to the International Telecommunications Union. According to Internet World Statistics, only 30.2% of the world's population has Internet access. That means that nearly 5 billion people do not have access to the world's most vast information and communication system.

THE PROBLEM:

Nearly 5 billion people worldwide do not have access to society's most powerful learning, entertaining, and communicating tool. This is due to a host of reasons including a lack of infrastructure, cost issues, and corrupt governments taking a hold of their states' Internet.

BLOC POSITIONS:

With the continued increase in vitality of the Internet, more and more nations will support the institution of the Internet access as a human right. More developed, 1st world nations specifically, will be in favor of this resolution. Countries such as the United States and Great Britain will be the greatest proponents. Nations such as Egypt that are coming off of a revolution and newly renewed country morale will be in great support of such a motion. Nations with the proper infrastructure and monetary capabilities will be in support as well.

Nations that lack these capabilities, mostly less developed nations, will not support such a resolution, as they do not have the means of providing such access. These nations have bigger things to worry about and so internet access would not be a very responsible endeavor to pursue. Also, nations that limit their citizen's internet access for different fears would be against this as they would be empowering their citizens with a tool they wish to limit from them.

COMMITTEE MISSION:

As the Internet has become a vital tool, it is the responsibility of this body to determine the degree of vitality of this tool. As some have argued it to be an instrumental human right, we must determine if states should be responsible for providing internet access to its citizens. Additionally, we must determine the appropriate levels of censorship and government control. A just, cost-effective solution to this issue would be most ideal.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- 1.) Has Internet access become an instrumental human right such as water and electricity?
- 2.) Should states be held responsible for providing the infrastructure necessary to provide all of their citizens with Internet access? If yes, how could this be done in a cost effective manner?
- 3.) What can be done to assure that corrupt governments do not abuse their power of controlling the Internet?

Sources for Further Research:

- CIA Factbook
- The United Nations Association of the United States of America
- New York Times
- BBC News
- <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/technology/2011/06/united-nations-wikileaks-internet-human-rights/38526/>
- <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/07/14/is-internet-access-a-human-right/>