



Dear Delegates,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2014 Montessori Model United Nations Conference.

The following pages intend to guide you in the research of the topics that will be debated at MMUN 2014 in committee sessions. Please note this guide only provides the basis for your investigation. It is your responsibility to find as much information necessary on the topics and how they relate to the country you represent. Such information should help you write your Position Paper, where you need to cite the references in the text and finally list all references in the Modern Language Association (MLA) format.

The more information and understanding you acquire on the two topics, the more you will be able to influence the Resolution writing process through debates [formal and informal caucuses], and the MMUN experience as a whole. Please feel free to contact us if and when you face challenges in your research or formatting your Position Papers.

We encourage you to learn all you can about your topics first and then study your country with regard to the two selected topics. Please remember that both committee members need to be well versed and ready to debate both topics.

Enjoy researching and writing your Position Papers.

We look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

MMUN Secretariat Team
info@montessori-mun.org



Background information on the Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the UN Office at Geneva. The Council is made up of 47 United Nations Member States which are elected by the UN General Assembly. The Human Rights Council replaced the former [United Nations Commission on Human Rights](#).

The Council was created by the United Nations [General Assembly](#) on 15 March 2006 by resolution [60/251](#). Its first session took place from 19 to 30 June 2006. One year later, the Council adopted its "[Institution-building package](#)" to guide its work and set up its procedures and mechanisms.

Among them were the [Universal Periodic Review](#) mechanism which serves to assess the human rights situations in all United Nations Member States, the [Advisory Committee](#) which serves as the Council's "think tank" providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues and the [Complaint Procedure](#) which allows individuals and organizations to bring human rights violations to the attention of the Council.

The Human Rights Council also works with the UN [Special Procedures](#) established by the former Commission on Human Rights and now assumed by the Council. These are made up of special rapporteurs, special representatives, independent experts and working groups that monitor, examine, advise and publicly report on thematic issues or human rights situations in specific countries.

Source: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/AboutCouncil.aspx>

Human Rights on the Internet

Topic Background



Outlining human rights is controversial enough in the physical world; on the Internet, defining rights is even more of an ambiguous task. Issues of human rights on the Internet are extremely nebulous given the size, scope, and borderless nature of the Internet world, which has no pre-set guardians, laws, or norms – a virtual no man’s land. Since the start of the Internet, three hotly discussed violations of rights have included withholding of access, censorship, and freedom of expression.

Since its invention, computer scientists and governments have questioned how to manage the Internet. As the Internet snowballed into a global phenomenon, structures for control became outdated.[i] As much as it is a tool for development, the Internet can be a dangerous instrument in cyber-attacks, organizing revolts, and espionage, thus governments often move to contain and regulate its content. However, the Internet is constantly evolving; hackers and every day users find ways to circumvent restrictions, therefore the task of maintaining Internet security often involves ever further limitations of access and privacy.

The first sub-issue concerning human rights on the Internet is lack of access. The Internet was invented in the United States, and as a result, today access is largely uncontested in the U.S. and in other developed countries. In the United States, about 80% of adults have Internet access in their homes.[ii]

However, widespread use requires a massive degree of infrastructure that many developing countries may lack. Worldwide, countries spend about 2.5% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on technological infrastructure. For instance, India spends only about 1%.[iii] While just over half of India’s population uses cell phones, according to the Pew Research Center only 13% of Indians use the Internet, with only 6% on social networking sites.

Other BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – average 46.5% use, and worldwide, only 36% adults reportedly have access to the Internet.[iv] That number tends to decrease as GDP, levels of alleged government freedom and respect for human rights, and levels of development decrease.

While in some countries, the question of access could be related to government corruption and the two further sub-issues of freedom of expression and censorship, many countries simply lack the resources to advance Internet access within their borders. The question then becomes: to what extent should the international community take responsibility for advancing Internet access as an effort to improve worldwide educational and quality of life standards?

Secondly, censorship – meaning the omission, manipulation, or deletion of public information – can be used as a tool with which governments deny their people objective information to prevent dissidence. In China, for example, only state-licensed and sponsored providers supply Internet access to the roughly fifty percent of China’s one billion citizens who can afford it. Governmental agencies deem certain keywords and site addresses as forbidden, blocking access to many popular sites such as Facebook and tracking mentions of those words by citizens.

©Montessori Model United Nations. All rights reserved.

Website: www.montessori-mun.org
Email: info@montessori-mun.org

As a result, individuals living in China read news, scholarly articles, and blog posts that have been approved by the government, often without the opportunity to gain another perspective, all other material having been blocked by the “Great Firewall of China”.^[v]



Violation of the Firewall or advocating for Internet freedom can be enough to land users in jail, such as Wang Lihong, who was arrested for “creating a disturbance” while protesting the prosecution of several bloggers.^[vi] China is a prime example of well-known censorship, but it exists in many other countries in varying degrees, from banning of an article or video to something as extreme as the Great Firewall.

Lastly, the issue of freedom of expression is increasingly relevant in countries like Egypt, where its 2011 revolution – deemed “Revolution 2.0” by some – depended heavily on Internet organization. The Arab Spring spread like wildfire across North Africa as protestors shared tweets, posts, photos, and videos, sharing the spirit and revolutionary fever to anyone who had Internet access. Wael Ghonim is an Egyptian revolutionary and Google employee whose use of Facebook and social media to organize and spark protest has garnered him international attention. He, and others, were held captive for days and interrogated as a result, the Egyptian government executed a full Internet shutdown (and interrupted cellular service) as a response.

The governments in Libya, Syria, and Egypt shut down Internet service, and some allege the Tunisian government utilized hacking measures on personal Facebook pages.^[vii] But not all limitations on freedom of expression are so overt – debate currently rages in the United States and other countries over the privacy of information on the Internet as government surveillance comes under fire. Fundamentally, the question is whether or not government has the right to utilize personal information, or even interrupt daily Internet activities, for the purposes of national security.

As more and more people worldwide gain access to the Internet, regulation becomes more impossible for any one government. The most severe of efforts such as those in China, Egypt, and other states beg questions of whether or not freedom of the Internet should be considered a basic human right and if the government should have authority to deny complete freedom in Internet use.

As technology continues to evolve into yet unexplored realms, the tension we already see in cases like Egypt will continue and worsen if the international community cannot come to a conclusion about how to consider and enforce Internet rights. Just as denial of basic physical rights can cause revolts, sanction, and even wars, ambiguity surrounding the human rights on the Internet could become a source of major conflict.

Past Actions

International action to protect Internet users’ rights has been sparse and weak. Obstacles include conflicting interests amongst governments and Internet users as well as a lack of intrinsic norms concerning what the rights of Internet users should be. In the twentieth session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, states authored a resolution adopted on July 5, 2012 asserting that the same rights, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), that humans enjoy “offline” should be enjoyed “online”, including the

©Montessori Model United Nations. All rights reserved.

Website: www.montessori-mun.org
Email: info@montessori-mun.org

“promotion, protection and enjoyment of human right, including the right to freedom of expression, on the Internet”.[viii] It also called upon states to facilitate the spread of access to the Internet for the purposes of development.



The resolution passed on year after Frank La Rue, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, presented a report to the Council in Geneva arguing that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees freedom on the Internet under Article 19.[ix] Absent from this resolution was the support of Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Iran and North Korea. This resolution was the first of its kind to affirm “online” rights, but founded upon the longstanding international basis of the UDHR.

Across the globe, multitudes of organizations advocate for Internet rights. One non-governmental organization working on this issue is the Internet Freedom Fellows, a group that aims to bring international leaders and non-governmental actors together in technological and political hubs across the globe to facilitate conversation on the issue.

In addition, the Internet Rights & Principles Coalition has authored multiple versions of a Charter aimed at international policymakers, containing the “10 Rights and Principles for Internet Governance”, and participated in EuroDIG, a June 2013 conference for European Dialogue on Internet Governance. These coalitions and conferences cover many issues ranging from access to censorship to political prisoner’s rights.

Non-governmental organizations are especially limited, however, when it comes to affecting change in this realm. Many world governments continue to limit Internet rights, contrary to the general wishes of its people and civil society sector, on the premises of security or a lack of belief in pure freedom of expression.

Possible Solutions

The United Nations must solidify the international community’s expectations for human rights on the Internet. While governments may disagree on the degree to which its people enjoy unlimited usage, the international community must have a standard to which governments should be held to foster freedom, education, and development. The Internet and other technologies will continue to grow, but without a unified, enforceable stance that guarantees access and freedom to all, the developmental gap will widen, and conflict over Internet freedom could grow into a full-blown crisis between people and state.

The UN should focus on addressing three sub-issues:

- **Access to the Internet:** Many countries lack the resources, will, and infrastructure to provide affordable, reliable Internet access to many of its citizens. How can the international community assist the country to build sustainable infrastructure and expand access? How can it provide services to those in poverty to utilize the Internet for education? Solutions for this could be development loans and microcredit, initiatives for foreign direct investment, and programs to teach computer science.



- **Censorship:** How will the international community address hesitation of many governments to honor the right to a censorship-free space? How can the international community enforce minimal censorship? Solutions could include pushing for government transparency and civil society monitoring and involvement.
- **Freedom of Expression:** How can relatively free states encourage relatively non-free states to honor freedom of expression? How can Internet users be protected? How can the international community be confident that people in a state have the right to free speech online and offline? Solutions to this could be empowerment of domestic civil society, international groups to provide legal advice, and the cooperation of Internet hosts in exposing governments who abuse these rights.

Further Research

Guiding Questions

- How is the Internet used in your country?
- Does your government promote Internet access or restrict it? Does your government censor the Internet?
- Does your government believe in freedom of expression? Does that freedom extend to the Internet?

Research Sources

- UN Human Rights Council: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/>
 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>
 - Internet Rights & Principles Coalition: <http://internetrightsandprinciples.org/site/>
-

[i] Internet Society. “A Brief History of the Internet”. <http://www.internetsociety.org/internet/what-internet/history-internet/brief-history-internet>.

[ii] Fernholz, Tim. “Why only 3% of India has home Internet access”. *Quartz*. March 22, 2013. <http://qz.com/66146/why-only-3-of-india-has-home-internet-access/>.

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] Reilly, Katie. “India ends the telegram, but Internet access is not close behind.” Pew Research Center. July 15, 2013. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/07/15/india-ends-the-telegram-but-internet-access-is-not-close-behind/>

[v] Human Rights Watch. “III. How Censorship Works in China: A Brief Overview”. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/china0806/3.htm>

[vi] Chinese rights advocates call for release of Internet activist.” *The Guardian*. August 3, 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/03/chinese-advocates-internet-activist-release>

©Montessori Model United Nations. All rights reserved.

Website: www.montessori-mun.org
Email: info@montessori-mun.org

[vii] Madrigal, Alexis C. “The Inside Story of How Facebook Responded to Tunisian Hacks.” *The Atlantic*. January 24, 2011.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/01/the-inside-story-of-how-facebook-responded-to-tunisian-hacks/70044/>

[viii] Government of Sweden. “United Nations General Assembly Draft Resolution of the Human Rights Council 20th Session: A/HRC/20/L.13.”

<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/19/64/51/6999c512.pdf>

[ix] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue.” Report for the Human Rights Council 17th Session. May 16, 2011.

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf.



©Montessori Model United Nations. All rights reserved.

Website: www.montessori-mun.org

Email: info@montessori-mun.org