

the same time, the Internet greatly increases the ease by which citizens can access government information while it increases the opportunities to increase citizen participation in governing processes.

Moreover, the Internet allows actors in civil societies everywhere, including journalists, to interact with each other at little expense. As Net accessibility expands, not only can those in northern countries communicate with each other, so increasingly will communications between south and north expand as will those between south and south.

Canada has a clear opportunity to take a leadership role in opposing restrictions on the Internet, as it has led on many other human rights issues. Many organizations, both national and international, have made initiatives in this area a priority. These include the CCPJ itself, most of its IFEX partners, Human Rights Watch, UNESCO, and many others.

On

the other hand, at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which is probably the major international forum for debating Internet censorship at this time, the US, France and Britain all favour certain restrictions on free expression. Canada, however, represented by the Departments of Industry and Justice, appears at this time to be less sympathetic to restrictions.

Playing a central role everywhere on the side of greater freedom of expression and fewer restrictions would be an important role for Canada to take. It would maximize Canada's potential to become a major information broker. As for the net itself, its remarkable potential can only be realized if it is free. Perhaps the ideal role for Canada, therefore, is to promote an international agreement that would apply to the Internet the half-century old values enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

2. Legislation and free expression.

The question of the legal framework and legislative protection for freedom of expression is both complex and controversial; free expression groups are by no means united on the answers. Of course the question of openly repressive press laws, now being extensively introduced throughout the world from eastern/central Europe and the states of the former Soviet Union to Asia, Africa and Latin America, all in the spurious name of state security, are easy and proper to oppose as vigorously as possible. The CCPJ, through IFEX and in other ways, works with like-minded organizations to make that opposition as effective as possible. The Canadian government, which has won a reputation among human rights organizations for its