GROUP 2
THE INTERNET AS A COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL

The exponential growth of the Internet has benefited NGOs and other activists, journalists and institutions working in the fields of freedom of expression and human rights. However, several problems are manifesting themselves. The abundance of information, the duplication of traditional media's static nature, the difficulty in meeting clients' needs, and access to information and to credible information are all points that demand action to improve the use of this medium. The participants in this group therefore considered projects and recommendations that could guide Canada in its development of a policy dealing with the Internet and human rights.

The last decade has witnessed a remarkable increase in the volume of information on the issue of human rights on the Internet. However, this growth has created a new challenge because, even though the number of sites has increased, few resources have been allocated to establishing measures to organize this surplus of information. As a result, research is difficult, often frustrating and can even be unproductive. It seems absolutely essential to establish mechanisms to facilitate research and guarantee the quality of information.

It was also found that the format used to disseminate information does not always meet clients' needs. Since information can be too complicated for the general public, too detailed for officials (eg. UN) or even too general for the players in the field, it seems necessary to harmonize the format of the information with users' needs.

The Internet's potential sets it apart from traditional media. However, this new technology is often used the same way as radio or television, that is, in a unilateral manner, with the media addressing the user. We must seize the opportunities the Internet offers to make it an interactive tool and move from monologue to dialogue.

The issue of access to information also raises several concerns. The desire to impose specific laws on the Internet and/or to make carriers responsible could hinder the circulation of information. Also, the stringency of the *Copyright Act* presents an obstacle to the dissemination of information.

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