

communication technology is providing an unprecedented means to leapfrog antiquated and inadequate communication networks. From the Canadian perspective, any international strategy to generate and disseminate knowledge is dependent on the free flow of information and, therefore, of free expression on the Net.

Perhaps not surprisingly, many regimes around the world, north and south, rich and poor, repressive and less repressive, feel threatened precisely by such unrestricted free speech. Some governments are pursuing an option that all who cherish free expression can only condemn without equivocation: attempting to reap the benefits of the information age for the market sector but to censor the Internet for the population at large—a major defeat for attempts to build a thriving civil society.

Beyond that, in a backlash against the Internet, at least 20 countries have imposed a wide range of restrictions on on-line communications, ranging from censorship of content to limitations of access. Such governments claim they want to protect children from "indecent" materials, thwart terrorists, or silence racists and hatemongers. This is not a simple matter. These may be real concerns, but in many countries, after all, child pornography and incitement to race hatred are already criminal offenses; it is not self evident why using the Internet in a criminal manner is different from using the radio or telephone. On the other hand, in practice we know such motives too often serve as a cover to legitimate other practices which clearly have as their real target the censoring of pro democracy and human rights discussions.

Canada's resolution to this dilemma may be instructive. This calls upon a country to have a constitution that explicitly guarantees the right of free speech except in carefully spelled out, extreme situations; for this purpose, Canadians are able to point to section 2 rights of our own Charter of Rights and Freedoms (see below). Canada also has an independent judiciary to which alleged violations of the Charter can be appealed. Without both the requisite constitutional guarantees and an independent judiciary, all restrictions on free speech must be resisted.

Even with these guarantees, however, those committed to free expression must be concerned that proposals to censor the Internet, whatever their ostensible motive, can lead open societies to become repressive and closed societies where political expression is constrained even further. Increasingly in such countries, free expression advocates, journalists and human rights monitors depend on the Net for communication and dissemination; Indonesia is one of many such examples. Similarly, as experience in Bosnia indicates, unrestricted use of and access to the Internet can prevent a repressive regime from silencing its opponents. At