

New Media vs. New Censorship: The Authoritarian Assault on Information

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Remarks to Broadcasting Board of Governors

Washington, DC

September 10, 2008

Thank you, Steve, for that kind introduction and thanks to the other governors and distinguished guests both here and with us on line for participating. It is a pleasure to be here. I have long held high regard for the critically important roles the Board and your constituent broadcasters play in communicating America's message to the world, and in partnering with NGOs and journalists. I want to commend you for holding this significant workshop today.

Nearly a century ago, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes reasoned against efforts to limit free expression, even if in the public interest, because of what he called "the marketplace of ideas."

Holmes argued that, "the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas, that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market." His prescience, 70 years before the birth of the Internet, is astonishing when we consider it through the lens of the issues we face today.

Today, the efforts of governments worldwide to restrict the free flow of information are on the rise. Some may argue that they filter or block the Internet to protect their citizens against dangerous or morally questionable ideas. Others do not even seek a pretense, they simply restrict access or silence those who speak out on the Internet. Most recently, we have seen instances of alleged government attacks on Internet capacities of other governments. In all of these cases, the common denominator is deliberate denial of the "marketplace of ideas."

Secretary Rice recognized this trend more than 2 years ago when she created the Global Internet Freedom Task Force, which I co-chair together with Under Secretary for Economics, Energy, and Agricultural Affairs Reuben Jeffery. I want to recognize Ambassador David Gross, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs who is here with us today, for his extensive work on Internet freedom.

The Taskforce brings together government, NGOs, and industry to work toward the following goals:

- To address the challenges to free expression and the free flow of ideas on the Internet,
- To advocate for the availability of the widest possible universe of content through the Internet, and
- To actively minimize the success of repressive regimes in censoring information, and increase the transparency of content restrictions.

The strategy for achieving these goals consists of three basic elements: **First**, *monitoring* Internet freedom in countries around the world; **second**, *responding* to threats to Internet freedom and; **third**, *advancing* Internet freedom by expanding access to the Internet. In each of these areas, we are making progress.

On *monitoring*, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor's annual country reports on human rights practices now contain a section solely dedicated to Internet freedom, to help policymakers, publics, and the Congress track problem areas.

The Human Rights bureau has also provided a grant to Freedom House for an initiative to assess and rank countries based on their Internet freedom policies and practices. And they are in close consultation with groups such as Reporters without Borders to learn about the work in their reports such as "Internet Enemies" and "Under Surveillance,, which help shine a light on Internet censorship.

The Taskforce also provides a channel for *responding* to threats to Internet freedom, where non-governmental organizations or internet service providers can flag for us an abuse, upon which we can then act.

We raise issues bilaterally, but we also engage multilaterally to leverage the impact of all our democratic partners. For example, at the April Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Telecom Ministerial, ministers "commended and encouraged continued openness of telecommunications to...broader economic development and prosperity."

Earlier this year, participants at the OECD Ministerial on the Future of the Internet Economy declared that "the further expansion of the Internet Economy will bolster the free flow of information, freedom of expression, and protection of individual liberties, as critical components of a democratic society and cultural diversity." The Bamako Ministerial Consensus of the Community of Democracies last year expressed its commitment to the central importance of Internet

freedom to democracy and development in three separate statements.

In a direct message to industry, Secretary Rice joined U.K. Foreign Secretary David Milliband in a visit to Google headquarters in May, where the Secretary characterized the Internet as “possibly one of the greatest tools for democratization and individual freedom that we’ve ever seen.” The two leaders called on industry to join them in finding common cause with fellow democracies in developing a set of international norms with regard to Internet freedom.

Finally, we strive to support journalists and press freedom organizations under threat through various grants and funding for initiatives such as providing secure websites for journalists under pressure from restrictive regimes.

The tactics of those who seek to obstruct Internet freedom change as rapidly as Internet technology itself. You who are on the cutting edge of this critical work will discuss best practices and new ideas today in this workshop. I look forward to a readout of your suggestions. We seek not only to ensure that the information superhighway remains unfettered, but also that access to it continually expands.

The U.S. Government has committed substantial resources to this end, and the investment is timely. Dramatic price reductions in the ICT sector worldwide mean that millions of new users can be empowered by Internet access.

Under the Global Internet Freedom Task Force, we are working with industry to accelerate this trend. We are collaborating with “Business for Social Responsibility” and “The Center for Democracy and Technology” to facilitate the development of a set of voluntary principles to encourage the technology industry to protect the free flow of information. I applaud this effort, which is based on successful models of corporate social responsibility in other sectors. For example, the extractive industries have voluntarily and proactively followed a similar path towards corporate responsibility.

With the right incentives from government, there is much industry can do to embrace the moral responsibility of resisting pressure by repressive governments, and to open the doors to unfettered information. With the partnership of fellow democracies, industry, and non-governmental organizations, efforts to regulate and restrict free speech will ultimately prove an unsuccessful attempt to hold back the rising tide of democratic change. As President Bush said in Bangkok last month, “Young people who grow up with the freedom to trade goods, will ultimately demand the freedom to trade ideas, especially on an unrestricted Internet.”

All of us here today share a commitment to doing what we can to dismantle those barriers which too often prevent young and enterprising minds from communicating and learning. We all have a part to play in this effort, and I thank you all for the work you have done, and that we will continue, together, to advance global internet freedom.