19th session of the Human Rights Council
Panel discussion on the right to freedom of expression on the Internet
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Oral statement by the Internet Society (ISOC)
Delivered by Markus Kummer, Vice-President, Public Policy

The Internet Society is very pleased that this dialogue at the intersection of Internet and Human Rights is taking place and we agree with much of what has been said by panelists and other speakers, in particular that there should be no difference in how we deal with the online and offline worlds. In our view, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reads like a definition of the Internet, even though it was written a quarter of a century before the invention of the Internet Protocol (TCP/IP). Indeed, the term “regardless of frontiers” seems to have been written with the Internet in mind. From the perspective of the Internet Society, there is no doubt that the unique characteristics of the Internet have empowered individuals to seek, receive and impart information and ideas in unexpected ways and scale.

The success of the Internet is based on an open and collaborative approach to policy, standards and technology development, such as carried out by engineers of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and other Internet institutions. The core values of the Internet pioneers are deeply rooted in the belief that the human condition can be enhanced through the reduction of communication and information barriers. Without open standards, the Internet would not be the powerful catalyst it is for access to information, freedom of expression and innovation.

These unique enabling qualities of the Internet should be preserved. Governments have the responsibility to enforce the laws that are in place. However, they also have the obligation to guarantee fundamental rights. There have been many examples of technological measures used to restrict access to content deemed undesirable, without due regard to the
potential impact on individuals’ capacity to exercise their fundamental rights. It is our firm conviction that technological shortcuts should not be used to solve societal problems.

With currently more than two billion people connected to the Internet, the same billions of individuals are entitled to have their fundamental rights respected online to the same standards applied to the offline world. We agree very much with the panelists who underlined that there should not be differentiated treatment depending on the medium used to exercise these rights.

The Internet Society will continue working with all stakeholders to ensure that the Internet stays open for the exercise of Human Rights and we would like to emphasize the importance of a multistakeholder dialogue to further this objective.

Thank you.

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About the Internet Society

The Internet Society is the world’s trusted independent source of information for Internet policy, technology standards, and future development. Based on its principled vision and substantial technological foundation, the Internet Society works with its members and Chapters around the world to promote the continued evolution and growth of the open Internet through dialog among companies, governments, and other organizations around the world. For more information, see: [http://www.internetsociety.org](http://www.internetsociety.org)