

**Internet access is a human right, according to a United Nations**

"Given that the Internet has become an indispensable tool for realizing a range of human rights, combating inequality, and accelerating development and human progress, ensuring universal access to the Internet should be a priority for all states," said the report from Frank La Rue, a special rapporteur to the United Nations, who wrote the document "on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression."

La Rue said in his report that access to the Internet is particularly important during times of political unrest, as demonstrated by the recent "Arab Spring" uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, among other countries.

From the report:

The Special Rapporteur believes that the Internet is one of the most powerful instruments of the 21st century for increasing transparency in the conduct of the powerful, access to information, and for facilitating active citizen participation in building democratic societies.

Indeed, the recent wave of demonstrations in countries across the Middle East and North African region has shown the key role that the Internet can play in mobilizing the population to call for justice, equality, accountability and better respect for human rights.

The report notes that while the Internet has been in existence since the 1960s, it is the way people now use the Internet, across the world and across age groups, with "incorporation into virtually every aspect of modern human life," that makes the Internet an unprecedented force.

**DOCUMENT: [Read the United Nations report](#)**

"According to the International Telecommunication Union, the total number of Internet users worldwide is now over 2 billion," the report said, also pointing out the huge growth in the number of active users on Facebook, which has surged from 150 million in 2009 to 600 million this year.

La Rue also urges governments to eschew laws that allow for people's access to the Internet to be blocked.

From the report:

The Special Rapporteur remains concerned that legitimate online expression is being criminalized in contravention of States' international human rights obligations, whether it is through the application of existing criminal laws to online expression, or through the creation of new laws specifically designed to criminalize expression on the Internet.

Such laws are often justified as being necessary to protect individuals' reputation, national security or to counter terrorism. However, in practice, they are frequently used to censor content that the Government and other powerful entities do not like or agree with.

La Rue describes the Internet as "revolutionary" and unlike any other communication medium such as radio, television or printed publications, which are "based on one-way transmission of information."

The Internet, on the other hand, is an "interactive medium" that allows not only for the sharing of information, but also "collaboration in the creation of content," which makes people "no longer passive recipients, but also active publishers of information."

As such, the Internet can be a tool of empowerment and aid in the protection of and access to other human rights -- as well as contributing to growth economically, socially and politically -- benefiting mankind as a whole.