“JOIN THE CAUSE” – HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE INTERNET

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1. HUMAN RIGHTS AS A GLOBAL ISSUE

Human rights are “basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled”. Proponents of the concept usually assert that all humans are endowed with certain entitlements merely by reason of being human¹. Human rights are thus conceived in a universalist and egalitarian fashion. Such entitlements can exist as shared norms of actual human moralities, as justified moral norms or natural rights supported by strong reasons, or as legal rights either at a national level or within international law². However, there is no consensus as to the precise nature of what in particular should or should not be regarded as a human right in any of the preceding senses, and the abstract concept of human rights has been a subject of intense philosophical debate and criticism.

¹ D. Feldman, *Civil Liberties & Human Rights*, Oxford 2002, p. 51.

² J. Nickel, *Human Rights*, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2009, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/rights-human/>, [30.04.2011].

As the new millennium emerges, trends in global human rights are changing. Human rights issues are crossing sovereign boundaries and are no longer just issues of the state. As more and more non-governmental organizations are growing, and the Internet expands and facilitates a quicker spread of information, there are more and more people raising concerns about human rights related issues. Some of these come from the increasingly larger and influential commercial sector including large, multinational companies, while the others are raised by ordinary people, being parts of different networks. The aim of this article is to examine the way social networks influence and change the methods of raising the awareness concerning human rights on one hand, but, on the other hand, to analyse how new media contribute to deepening global inequalities.

According to Manuel Castells, these are networks that constitute the new social morphology of our societies³. Asked to provide a definition of the network society, Castells says: "...the definition, if you wish, in concrete terms of a network society is a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks. So it's not just about networks or social networks, because social networks have been very old forms of social organization. It's about social networks which process and manage information and are using micro-electronic based technologies"⁴. The diffusion of a networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. For Castells, networks have become the basic units of modern society. Jan Van Dijk – a creator of the notion of "network society" does not go that far; for him these units still are individuals, groups, organizations and communities, though they may increasingly be linked by networks⁵.

³ M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Malden 2000, p. 500.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ J. van Dijk, *The Network Society*, 1999, http://www.gw.utwente.nl/vandijk/research/network_society/network_society_plaatje/b_book_summary.doc/, [30.04.2011].

The network society goes further than the information society that is often proclaimed. Castells argues that it is not purely the technology that defines modern societies, but also cultural, economical and political factors that make up the network society. Influences such as religion, cultural upbringing, political organizations, and social status all shape the network society. Societies are shaped by these factors in many ways. These influences can either raise or hinder these societies. For van Dijk, information forms the substance of contemporary society, while networks shape the organizational forms and (infra)structures of this society.

The *Space of Flows* plays a central role in Castells' vision of the network society. It is a network of communications, defined by hubs where these networks crisscross. Castells puts great importance on the networks and argues that the real power is to be found within the networks rather than confined in global cities. There has never been a time in recorded history that communication among diverse nations and peoples has not been important. It just may be now that it becomes even more important as different cultures, races, ethnicities and classes are brought together, whether physically or virtually, to struggle within, and against, what they perceive to be negative social consequences of the global neo-liberal model of development and democracy. Likewise, it may be safe to say that there has not been a better time for facilitating communication among these diverse groups. The global information communication technologies infrastructure continues to grow as does the use of the media to negotiate social change and justice. Non-governmental organisations, grassroots activists, and social movement actors are becoming more intertwined, working with transnational advocacy networks, to leverage their strengths and make an impact on local, national and global realities.

Through new and established social networks and the use of the Internet and other technologies, these transnational advocacy networks are contributing to what some consider to be a global civil society, a progressive movement operating outside of the state and market control. NGOs are key players in this network, working to influence international and state policies by researching and disseminating information, developing awareness campaigns, lobbying and organising direct action in collaboration with other organisations and networks. While recognising the value

of the networks and their capacities for social change, it is important to understand how the networks facilitate representation among local and global actors⁶.

2. GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY

The contemporary era can be characterised as one undergoing an intensified process of globalisation, understood in terms of economic, political, cultural and technological change⁷. The technical revolution that begun in the 1970^s and the related economic, cultural and political developments have contributed to an intensification of both concrete global interdependence and a consciousness of the global whole⁸. The increasing sense of mutual interdependence due to enhanced globalisation, combined with the means for communicating across vast distances, has proven effective in producing new forms of cultural and political solidarity and understanding of international norms⁹.

Because social life and social relations are increasingly constituted on a global scale, recent forms of mobilisation have taken on a new dynamic. Advances in mass media, information systems and technology have radically changed the nature of political, subjective and everyday life. As Mark Poster points out, the recent technological advances have “enabled a system of multiple producers, distributors and consumers to use decentralised and newly accessible media technologies in everyday practices”¹⁰.

⁶ H. Custard, *The Internet and Global Civil Society: Communication & Representation Within Transnational Advocacy Networks*, 2007, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/6/8/5/8/p168587_index.html, [30.04.2011].

⁷ P. Dicken, *Global Shift*, New York 1999; L. Sklair, *The Transnational Capital Class and Global Capitalism*, “Political Power and Social Theory” 1998, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 3–43.

⁸ A. Giddens, *The consequences of modernity*, Stanford 1990; M. Castells, *The Informational City*, Oxford 1989.

⁹ J. Smith, *Globalizing Resistance: The Battle of Seattle and the Future of Social Movements*, [in:] *Globalization and Resistance: Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements*, eds. H. Johnston, J. Smith, Lanham 2002, pp. 207–227; A. Ross, *No sweat*. New York 1990.

¹⁰ M. Poster, *Second Media Age*, Cambridge 1995, p. 5.

He further states: “When users have decentralised, distributed, direct control over when, what, why, and with whom they exchange information... it seems to breed critical thinking, activism, democracy and equality... This electronically mediated communication can challenge the system of domination”¹¹. The Internet is thus potentially more persuasive and effective in diffusing social ideas and actions within a global community than any other communication technology in history¹².

The meaning and role of civil society has not gone uncontested. It is not a neutral concept but instead it is embedded with historical and social biases depending upon its context and purpose. Some envision civil society as the duty to uphold the tenets of liberalism, and to protect the market at all costs, while others recognize civil society as a space that resides outside of the state and the market. From this latter perspective, human beings are seen as acting together to ensure, according to Howell and Pearce, an “intellectual and political space where alternative routes to economic prosperity and social justice can be explored”¹³. It is this example that best represents how many grassroots activists and NGOs have been characterised. Working for social change, these actors engage in activities that aim to alter not only national policies and practices, but international ones as well¹⁴.

This opens up a new terrain of collaboration among individuals and organisations who share information, coordinate activities, lobby governments and corporations, and serve as watchdogs over issues related to ethics and social justice, such as human rights, environmental protection and freedom of speech, to name only a few. Boli and Thomas describe this global interaction as the inception of a world culture, one in which actors

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 28, 57.

¹² M. Castells, *Internet Galaxy. Reflexions on the Internet*, Oxford 2001.

¹³ J. Howell, J. Pearce, *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration*, Boulder 2002, p. 230.

¹⁴ V. Carty, *Protest, Cyberactivism, and New Social Movements: The Reemergence of the Peace Movement Post 9/11*, 2007, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/1/8/6/8/p18681_index.html, [30.04.2011].

of different nationalities and ethnicities collaborate from a common framework that allows cultural and social change¹⁵.

3. SOCIAL NETWORK SERVICES – A CASE FOR FACEBOOK

The concepts described by Jan van Dijk and Manuel Castells, but also developed by Barry Wellman, Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff¹⁶, can be seen throughout modern technology, especially through the phenomenon of Web 2.0. The new generation of the Internet allows users to do more than just retrieve information. They can operate on the interactive facilities of Web 1.0 to provide “Network as platform” computing, allowing users to run software-applications entirely through a browser¹⁷. Users can own the data on a Web 2.0 site and exercise control over that data¹⁸. These sites may have an “Architecture of participation” that encourages users to add value to the application as they use it¹⁹. The impossibility of excluding group-members who don’t contribute to the provision of goods from sharing profits gives rise to the possibility that rational members will prefer to withhold their contribution of effort and free-ride on the con-

¹⁵ J. Boli, J. Thomas, *World Culture in the World Polity: A Century of International Non-Governmental Organization*, “American Sociological Review” 1997, Vol. 62(2), pp. 171–190.

¹⁶ P. Craven, B. Wellman, *The Network City*. “Sociological Inquiry” 1973, Vol. 43, pp. 57–88; B. Wellman, *Structural Analysis: From Method and Metaphor to Theory and Substance*, [in:] *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, eds. B. Wellman, S.D. Berkowitz, Cambridge 1988, pp. 19–61; B. Wellman, *The Community Question: The Intimate Networks of East Yorkers*. “American Journal of Sociology” 1979, Vol. 84, pp. 120–131; R. Hiltz, M. Turoff, *The Network Nation*, Reading 1978.

¹⁷ T. O’Reilly, *What is Web 2.0*, <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>, 2005 [30.04.2011].

¹⁸ D. Hinchcliffe, *The State of Web 2.0*, 2006, http://web2.wsj2.com/the_state_of_web_20.htm, [30.04.2011].

¹⁹ P. Graham, *Web 2.0*, 2005, <http://www.paulgraham.com/web20.html>, [30.04.2011].

tribution of others²⁰. According to Daniel Best²¹, the characteristics of Web 2.0 are: rich user experience, user participation, dynamic content, meta-data, web standards and scalability. Further characteristics, such as openness, freedom²² and collective intelligence²³ by way of user participation, can also be viewed as essential attributes of Web 2.0. Web sites such as ‘Facebook’ and ‘MySpace’ are prime examples of a Network Society at work. These sites allow people all over the world to communicate through digital means without face to face contact. Other means include instant messenger servers, such as MSN, and email servers, including Hotmail, Yahoo Mail, Google Mail, and many others. All of these web services provide a means for people to communicate without personal contact.

A social network service focuses on building and reflecting social networks or social relations among people, e.g., who share interests and/or activities. A social network service essentially consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most social network services are web based and provide a means for users to interact over the internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging. Although online community services are sometimes considered as a social network service in a broader sense, social network service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks.

²⁰ G. Marwell, R.E. Ames, 1979. *Experiments on the Provision of Public Goods. I. Resources, Interest, Group Size, and the Free-Rider Problem*, “The American Journal of Sociology” 1979, Vol. 84, No. 6, pp. 1335–1360.

²¹ D. Best, *Web 2.0: Next Big Thing or Next Big Internet Bubble?* Lecture Web Information Systems. Technische Universiteit Eindhoven 2006.

²² L. Greenmeier, S. Gaudin, *Amid The Rush To Web 2.0, Some Words Of Warning – Web 2.0 – InformationWeek*, 2005, http://www.informationweek.com/news/management/showArticle.jhtml;jsessionid=EWRPGLVJ53OW2QSNDLPCKHSCJUNN2JVN?articleID=199702353&_requestid=494050, [30.04.2011].

²³ T. O’Reilly, *What is Web 2.0. Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software*, 2005, http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/4580/1/MPRA_paper_4580.pdf [30.04.2011].

The most popular social network service is Facebook. It has a number of features with which users may interact. They include the Wall, a space on every user's profile page that allows friends to post messages for the user to see; Pokes, which allows users to send a virtual "poke" to each other (a notification then tells a user that they have been poked); Photos, where users can upload albums and photos; and Status, which allows users to inform their friends of their whereabouts and actions. Users can create profiles with photos, lists of personal interests, contact information and other personal information. Communicating with friends and other users can be done through private or public messages or a chat feature. Users can also create and join interest groups and "like pages", some of which are maintained by organisations as a means of advertising. This feature, as well as the possibility of creating groups of interest, influences the issue of human rights the most, as far as social network services are concerned.

4. JOIN THE CAUSE...

There are several groups of interest created each day on Facebook. Divided into categories, they might concern business, entertainment, art, music etc. These which may be found the most important, regarding the issue of human rights, are the groups from the categories: "common interests" and "organizations".

Four different sub-categories may be distinguished amongst the two latter ones:

- Groups which express the users' common activities, frustrations, created mainly for entertainment purposes.
- Groups which express the users' opinions and certain philosophy of life, point of view, like: "Government+religion=disaster" or "1 Membre dans ce Groupe = 1 Raciste en moins dans le Monde" ("1 Member in this group = 1 racist less in the world").
- Groups that represent really existing organizations, usually non-governmental ones: "Amnesty International", "Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières".

- Groups that were established for a special purpose, which is included in the name of the group; groups of support for a particular cause: “Nie dla krzyży w szkołach” (“No to crosses in schools”), “Say NO to 36week ABORTIONS”, “Human Rights Watch”.

Whilst the needs of this analysis the first group may be omitted, the second one does not require deeper analysis either. The members of the second category of groups simply present their opinions and points of view, which is dictated by the need of expression, of inclusion into some social groups, natural for human nature. The groups that represent organisations serve as a means of promotion, using cheap and efficient tools, offered by the Internet. Their functioning and success depends on the citizens’ support, so that they exploit all methods of gaining it.

The most interesting category of Facebook groups is the last one – groups created for a particular cause, included in the name of the group. The name itself indicates the will of action, whereas this action rarely takes place. A group “Feed a child with a click”, although the name suggests that with a click one might make a donation, does not serve to provide anyone with food supplies, but rather to gain popularity for the group itself. Group “A Million to stop the Traffic” describes itself as united against “being deceived or taken against your will, bought, sold and transported into slavery for sexual exploitation, sweat shops, child brides, circuses, sacrificial worship, forced begging, sale of human organs, farm labour, domestic servitude”, while there is no connection between gaining a million members of the group and the decrease in human traffic. There are no actions performed on the Internet (or organised virtually, but practiced in reality) by the members of the group “World Peace” or “Soutien au peuple Haïtien” (“Support for Haiti People”).

There may be certain educational aspect of the groups, such as “Play to Stop Europe for Climate” or “Domestic Abuse” – they do promote a specific cause, raising public awareness. However, most of the groups are of such genre, despite their noble titles, seem superficial. Their acting in favour of human rights is minimal, contrary to them being a means of promotion for their founders.

However Facebook is currently the biggest social network service in the world, connecting to over 350 million users, not everyone is able to

benefit from network society's achievements. There are two main factors disrupting participation in global civil society – digital divide and limitations of the Internet use in totalitarian systems.

5. DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide is the gap between people with effective access to digital and information technology and those with very limited or no access at all. It includes the imbalances in physical access to technology as well as the imbalances in resources and skills needed to effectively participate as a digital citizen. In other words, it is the unequal access by some members of society to information and communication technology, and the unequal acquisition of related skills. The term is closely related to the knowledge divide as the lack of technology causes lack of useful information and knowledge. The digital divide may be classified based on gender, income, and race groups, and by locations. The term global digital divide refers to differences in technology access between countries or the whole world.

There are various definitions of the term “digital divide”. Bharat Mehra defines it simply as “the troubling gap between those who use computers and the Internet and those who do not”²⁴. This term initially referred to gaps in the ownership of, or regular access to, a computer. As Internet access came to be seen as a central aspect of computing, the term's usage shifted to encompass gaps in not just computers but also access to the Internet. Recently, some have used the term to refer to gaps in broadband network access. The term can mean not only unequal access to computer hardware, but also inequalities between groups of people in the ability to use information technology fully.

Due to the range of criteria which can be used to assess the imbalance, and the lack of detailed data on some aspects of technology usage, the exact nature of the digital divide is both contextual and debatable. Crite-

²⁴ M. Bharat, C. Merkel, A. Bishop, *Internet for Empowerment of Minority and Marginalized Communities*. “New Media & Society” 2004, Vol. 6(5), pp. 781–802.

ria often used to distinguish between the “haves” and the “have nots” of the digital divide tend to focus on access to hardware, access to the Internet, and details relating to both categories. Some scholars fear that these discussions might be discouraging the creation of Internet content that addresses these needs.

The discussions on digital divide are often tied with other concepts. Lisa Servon argued in 2002 that the digital divide “is a symptom of a larger and more complex problem – the problem of persistent poverty and inequality”. As described by Mehra²⁵, the four major components that contribute to the digital divide are “socioeconomic status, with income, educational level, and race among other factors associated with technological attainment”. Recognition of the digital divide as an immense problem has led scholars, policy makers, and the public to understand the “potential of the Internet to improve everyday life for those on the margins of society and to achieve greater social equity and empowerment”.

Another key dimension of the digital divide is the global digital divide, reflecting existing economic divisions in the world. This global digital divide widens the gap in economic divisions around the world. Countries with a wide availability of Internet access can advance the economics of that country on a local and global scale. In today’s society, jobs and education are directly related to the Internet, in that the advantages that come from the Internet are so significant that neglecting them would leave a company vulnerable in a changing market. In countries where the Internet and other technologies are not accessible, education is suffering, and uneducated people and societies that are not benefiting from the information age, cannot be competitive in the global economy²⁶. This leads to these countries, which tend to be developing countries, suffering a greater economic downfall and richer countries advancing their education and economy. However, when dealing with the global aspect of the digital divide there are several factors that lead to digital divide. For example, country of residence, ethnicity, gender, age, educational attainment, and

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ M.R. Burks, *Economic Factors Involved with Universal Internet Access and People with Special Needs* – A Working Paper, 2001, http://www.icdri.org/BurksMISC/economic_factors_involved_with_u.htm, [30.04.2011].

income levels are all factors of the global aspects of digital divide. In addition, research shows that in 15 Western European countries females, manual workers, elderly, and the less educated have less Internet access than males, professionals the young, and the well educated. The digital divide is a term used to refer to the gap between people who have access to the Internet and those that do not. It can also refer to the skills people have – the divide between peoples who are at ease using technology to access and analyse information and those who are not.

6. INTERNET CENSORSHIP

Throughout recent years, Internet applications were used for political purposes in several parts of the world, including non-democratic political systems, i.e. Iran, China, Venezuela and other countries. Authoritarian governments have had significant challenges defeating the use of tools that help expose civil unrest and dissatisfaction among the population in those countries. Several examples of such actions include Iranian demonstrations during elections, Venezuela's use of Twitter and threats of controlling Internet access, China's attack on Google services²⁷. However, these are only particular cases, whilst many authoritarian systems exert the Internet censorship.

Internet censorship is control or suppression of the publishing or accessing of information on the Internet. The legal issues are similar to offline censorship. One difference is that national borders are more permeable online: residents of a country that bans certain information can find it on websites hosted outside the country. A government can try to prevent its citizens from viewing these even if it has no control over the websites themselves. Filtering can be based on a blacklist or be dynamic. In the case of a blacklist, that list is usually not published. The list may be produced manually or automatically. Barring total control on Internet-connected computers, such as in North Korea, total censorship of information on the

²⁷ D. Hanchard, *Apple, Facebook, Twitter, HP decline to testify re: Human Rights and Law*, 2010, <http://government.zdnet.com/?p=7497>, [30.04.2011].

Internet is very difficult (or impossible) to achieve due to the underlying distributed technology of the Internet. Pseudonymity and data havens (such as Freenet) allow unconditional free speech, as the technology guarantees that material cannot be removed and the author of any information is impossible to link to a physical identity or organization.

In 2006, Reporters without Borders (*Reporters sans frontières*, RSF, a Paris-based international non-governmental organization that advocates freedom of the press) published a list of the 13 “enemies of the Internet”²⁸: The organization classifies a country as an enemy of the Internet because “all of these countries mark themselves out not just for their capacity to censor news and information online but also for their almost systematic repression of Internet users”²⁹. The list is updated annually and in 2009 included 12 countries: Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam.

Internet use is so threatening in Burma that even going online is considered a dissident act, thus giving the country a very low penetration rate. The internet is regulated by the Electronic Act which bans the importing and use of a modem without official permission, and the penalty for violating this is a 15 year prison sentence, as it is considered “damaging state security, national unity, culture, the national economy and law and order”³⁰. Burma has banned the websites of political opposition groups, sites relating to human rights, and organizations promoting democracy in Burma³¹. During the 2007 anti-government protests, Burma completely shut down all Internet links from its country³².

Internet censorship in the People’s Republic of China is conducted under a wide variety of laws and administrative regulations. It is worthy to note that while the United States actively allows the use of these services

²⁸ *List of the 13 Internet enemies*, 2006, <http://en.rsf.org/>, [30.04.2011].

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Report Reporters Without Borders, *Internet enemies*, http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Internet_enemies_2009_2_.pdf, [30.04.2011].

³¹ Open Net Initiative 2006, *Internet Filtering Map*, <http://www.opennet.net/map/index2.html>, [30.04.2011].

³² *Burma cuts all Internet links*, “Bangkok Post” 2007, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews?id=122120>, [30.04.2011].

under virtually no screening, their close trading partner endorses full screening of all communication. In accordance with these laws, more than sixty Internet regulations have been made by the government of People's Republic of China, and censorship systems are vigorously implemented by provincial branches of state-owned business companies, and organizations³³.

According to Reporters Without Borders³⁴, Cuba has the lowest ratio of computers per inhabitant in Latin America, and the lowest internet access ratio of all the Western hemisphere³⁵. Citizens have to use government controlled "access points", where their activity is monitored through IP blocking, keyword filtering and browsing history checking. The government cites its citizens' access to internet services are limited due to the high costs and the American embargo, but there are reports concerning the will of the government to control access to uncensored information both from and to the outer world³⁶. The Cuban government continues to imprison independent journalists for contributing reports through the Internet to web sites outside of Cuba³⁷. Salim Lamrani, a professor at Paris Descartes University, has accused Reporters Without Borders with making unsupported and contradictory statements regarding Internet connectivity in Cuba³⁸. However, despite precise figures are hard to know because of the secretive nature of the regime and its telecommunication policies, testimonials from independent bloggers, activists and interna-

³³ Human Rights Watch 2006, *How Censorship Works in China: A Brief Overview*, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/china0806/3.htm>; *Chinese Laws and Regulations Regarding Internet*, <http://www.chinaeclaw.com/english/showCategory.asp?Code=022>, [30.04.2011].

³⁴ Reporters Without Borders, *Internet enemies*, http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Internet_enemies_2009_2_.pdf [30.04.2011].

³⁵ Reporters Without Borders 2007, *Minister blames US embargo for low number of Cubans online*, http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=20999, [30.04.2011].

³⁶ World Politics Watch 2006, *Press Freedom Group Tests Cuban Internet Surveillance*, <http://worldpoliticswatch.com/article.aspx?id=321>, [30.04.2011].

³⁷ Reporters Without Borders 2007, *Journalist sentenced to four years in prison as pre-criminal social danger*, http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=21793, [30.04.2011].

³⁸ L. Lamrani, *Reporters Without Borders' Lies about Cuba*, 2009, <http://www.global-research.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleId=14202>, [30.04.2011].

tional watchers agree by saying the difficulties for non-government people to access the web as well as the harsh punishments against transgressors³⁹ are the norm. The Committee to Protect Journalists has pointed out Cuba as one of the ten most censored countries around the world⁴⁰.

On January 21st, Hillary Clinton gave a speech on Internet freedom in Washington, DC’s Newseum. She didn’t hesitate to call out censorship regimes. Clinton stated that “countries that heavily censor the Net are creating a new “Information Curtain” to rival the old Iron Curtain of the Cold War era”⁴¹. It needs to be admitted how difficult the process of establishing international norms relating to Internet control would be – and it is certainly true that, despite many edge cases and cultural differences, a clear line can be drawn between what is happening in China and Iran and what is happening in most democracies.

7. CONCLUSION

The paper presented above aims at highlighting the role of the Internet in nourishing global civil society. There is a long way to go in creating a technological infrastructure that supports true interaction among the world’s most dispossessed, but even greater distance must be covered before their voices can be heard and understood. What is obvious is the lack of discussion related to the act of communication among those representing men and women of diverse nationalities, languages, religions, social and economic backgrounds, etc. it is widely known that challenges and potential pitfalls that result when miscommunication and misunderstanding results across cultures. People do have techniques and training

³⁹ Inter American Press Association 2006, *Inter American Press Association 62nd General Assembly Reports: Cuba*, http://www.sipiapa.org/publications/informe_cuba2006o.cfm, [30.04.2011].

⁴⁰ CPJ 2006, *Special Report*, http://www.cpj.org/censored/censored_06.html, [30.04.2011].

⁴¹ N. Anderson, *Hillary Clinton slams “Information Curtain” of censorship*, 2010, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/news/2010/01/hillary-clinton-slams-information-curtain-of-censorship.ars>, [30.04.2011].

structures that have been developed to help educate and sensitise them to improving their intercultural communication abilities. The research field is wide open for the study how, if and why different cultures participating in networks interpret discussions, negotiate meanings, and contribute to problem-solving. In addition, the Internet users have much to learn about how electronic communication affects these practices and facilitates or discourages representation and hierarchies of power among network members⁴². Custard states that: “as enlightened global citizens, we must envisage changing world trends and engage in the process of regulating the change within a context in which diversity and cultural differences are valued and balanced. We need not only cultivate the ability to map our own and another’s cultures, but also to monitor ourselves so we may harmonise our identity with that of our continuity by extending personal attributes such as sensitivity and open-mindedness, to build a bridge across personal, social, and cultural gaps... We need to learn those behavioral requirements, such as flexibility, active listening, and interaction management, that enable us to negotiate the multiple meanings and manage complexity and conflicts in the global context”⁴³.

These attributes align well with the rhetoric of the global civil society, and because NGOs have structured a place within the network, they often have the technological capacity and the mission to integrate intercultural communication practices into their practice. Until true democratic communication and negotiation is facilitated among the world’s diverse peoples, the citizens will always be a step away from a true global civil society, and remain among a system dominated by economic, political, and social hierarchies of power⁴⁴.

⁴² H. Custard, *The Internet and Global Civil Society: Communication & Representation Within Transnational Advocacy Networks*, 2007, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/6/8/5/8/p168587_index.html, [30.04.2011].

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.