This is an invitation to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to be part of a worldwide movement that seeks to respect, protect and promote human rights in the digital age.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE INTERNET

The Key Role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in Protecting Human Rights in the Digital Age

There is not a clear distinction between "online" and "offline" worlds anymore. When we talk about human rights in modern societies, ***we must consider how internet can strengthen them.***

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The internet is a unique platform to better express people's **opinions and desires and exchange information** thus helping people be more **actively engaged.**

WOMEN AND GENDER RIGHTS

The internet is a critical global resource that **enables women and LGBTIQ people** to exercise their rights. However, existing **power relationships** in society can interfere with the use and enjoyment of the internet by women and LGBTIQ people.

PRIVACY

Privacy enables individuals to **protect themselves** against unwarranted interference in their lives. **Surveillance** by governments, private businesses and other users can limit our ability to enjoy full citizenship online as well as offline.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS (ESCRS)

The internet is also increasingly becoming an **important enabler** of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs), such as the rights to health, education, cultural expression, and the benefits of science and technology. Around the world, factors like gender, age, caste, social class and ethnicity often **determine those who can and cannot** enjoy ESCRs thorough the internet.

We are all cyborgs.
Digital technologies are an extension of ourselves. Increasingly, our economies, politics, relationships and rights are mediated and facilitated by the internet.

The internet's role has become so much more relevant today that many governments have tried to regulate it in ways that threaten citizens' rights. Likewise, almost all our online interactions are made through private platforms; therefore human rights of users are also impacted by the role of private companies.

There are many hurdles obstructing a full awareness of human rights online. ***The internet has become a key site of struggle for the full enjoyment of human rights.***

Some obstacles to the full enjoyment and realisation of human rights on the internet are:

INTERNET SHUTDOWNS
An internet shutdown is an intentional disruption of internet, usually by governments, in order to make it inaccessible or effectively unusable for a specific population or within a location. These kinds of attacks **have an impact on a range of human rights** (freedom of expression, right to health, education, among many others).

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ONLINE
Online violence is part of the continuum of gender-based violence. On the internet, women and LGBTIQ people especially suffer **misogynist attacks, threats and intimidation.**

CENSORSHIP AND CRIMINALISATION:
In various political contexts, states are censoring and **criminalising expression online** and non-state actors play a role in "policing" online expression.

SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGIES
Digital communications allow governments and companies to **violate citizens' privacy** in previously unimagined ways

BARRIERS TO INTERNET ACCESS AND ITS BENEFITS
People who do not have access to the whole internet or cannot afford to use it , cannot use it to **improve their lives.**

What can NHRIs do to uphold and promote internet rights?

NHRIs have a key role to play in order to protect and promote human rights on the internet

Internet rights promotion: NHRIs can create a national culture of respect for the internet rights.

- Increase public awareness of internet rights (campaigns, seminars, press conferences, etc.).
- Assist in the formulation and delivery of education initiatives.
- Impart trainings about internet rights for key groups such as NGOs, judges, police, journalists, etc.

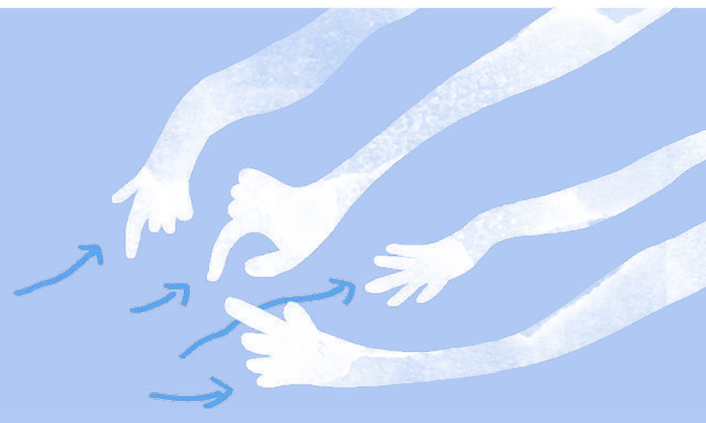
Internet rights protection. NHRIs have the responsibility of protecting all human rights exercised through any medium.

- Investigate human rights abuses on the internet.
- Monitor legislations that can undermine internet rights.
- Advise governments and other authorities about internet rights protection.
- Include reports on internet related rights in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and other human rights monitoring bodies.

Human rights violations can also happen through cyberattacks. ***Be alert: NHRI members, staff, witnesses and sources can be targets of governments and third parties.***

1. THREAT MODELLING
   NHRIs must determine what data they need to protect in their investigation of rights violations, and whom they need to protect it from in order to keep it secure from unauthorised access and abuse.

2. ADOPT MEASURES
   Based on the threat modelling, NHRIs should adopt measures and tools for their digital security, such as:



Have a well-developed internet and communication policy that helps the institution stay effective and secure.

To avoid unlawful interception of communications, use online communication services with encryption protocols. For example, use PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) on your emails.

To prevent others from having access to your visitors' sensitive information as it passes through the internet, NHRIs should enable HTTPS (a communications protocol for secure communication over a computer network) on their websites.

Save encrypted backups of your documentation and store them in services that use robust security features, including encryption.

For more information, please read: "Human Rights and the Internet" in https://www.apc.org/en/pubs
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