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Assistant Secretary of State Michael H. Posner ([audio](#))
Remarks to the “Freedom Online” Conference
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I am delighted to be back in Kenya, a country I know well and where I have many friends and have spent considerable time. I want to commend the Kenyan government for hosting this conference and for the leadership role you are playing on Internet and information technology issues. I had the privilege of meeting with Minister Poghiso last December at the launch of the Coalition, and I am honored to be speaking after him today.

Kenya now has well over 15 million Internet users, and leads East Africa in mobile penetration, with more than two-thirds of all Kenyans now connected. The fact that so many African countries are participating in this conference is a tribute to Kenya’s leadership and convening power.

Kenya is not alone in embracing mobile and digital technologies. In neighboring Tanzania, for example, more than half of its citizens are using mobile phones. In Ghana, mobile penetration is now over 90%. These are statistics that were unimaginable a decade ago, and are cause for reflection and celebration.

Across Africa today, there is a new kind of race – a race to connect as many citizens as quickly as possible. By doing so, we are changing the development paradigm in ways none of us yet fully understand.

But while our technologies change, our fundamental principles and our development challenges do not. And so today I would like to say a few words about the role of Internet freedom, and how the free flow of information has implications for human rights and development.

I believe it’s futile in the long run to try to separate one kind of freedom from another, to attempt to distinguish online freedoms from freedoms we enjoy in the physical world, or to try to keep the Internet open for business in a given country but closed for free expression.

Because, as Secretary Clinton said at the first Freedom Online conference in The Hague in December, “There isn’t an economic Internet and a social Internet and a political Internet: there’s just the Internet.”

Yet we continue to see attempts by countries to harness the economic power of the Internet while controlling political and cultural content. Some countries are devoting great resources to attempting to purge their online space or, like Iran, attempting to isolate their people inside what amounts to a national intra-net - a digital bubble. Such attempts may succeed for a limited time in some places; but at a cost to a nation’s education system, its political stability, its social mobility, and its economic potential.

These are costs that no nation can afford. Whether developed or developing, the economies of the 21st century must compete to attract capital, to spark innovation, to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit of our people and provide the climate in which they develop enterprises that can provide jobs and sustainable growth.

Around the world, some groups tend to focus more on erasing the digital divide, extending Internet access that last difficult mile, and putting into the hands of the next two billion users a mobile device that also provides access to banking and education, medical and agricultural advice and so much more. Meanwhile, other groups tend to focus more on Internet freedom, ensuring that the evolving information and communication technologies remain the foundation of an open, global platform for exchange, where people can exercise their rights, and not a tool used to spy on or silence citizens.

Today, the world has not one but *two* digital divides – the divide between the two billion of us who have some form of Internet access and the five billion who have yet to get it, and also a divide between those who enjoy the free use of their connectivity, and those whose experience of the Internet is restricted by censorship of the information they can receive and fear of retaliation for the information they transmit. The access divide is narrowing, thanks to the efforts of people around the world and the hard work of people in this room. But the second divide, the freedom divide, is widening.

We must continue to work together to erase both divides, and these interests must be pursued in tandem.

This is a world in which citizens of democratic nations can have uncensored Internet access and thus membership in a global community that exchanges news, information, ideas, products, innovations and services. At the same time it’s a world where citizens of some other countries remain trapped and isolated behind firewalls that stunt not just their political freedom but ultimately their economic opportunities. We must do everything possible to oppose what amounts to information curtain created by national governments that do not want their own people to have full and free access to the Internet.

There are no magic bullets that will erase this divide overnight, but the United States is committed to helping expand the benefits of information and communications technologies to other nations as an integral part of both our human rights and our development policies.

As President Obama wrote last week – in response to a question put to him during an Internet chat -- “We will fight hard to make sure that the Internet remains the open forum for everybody — from those who are expressing an idea to those [who] want to start a business.”

The United States takes a holistic approach to these issues. We recognize the linkages between broad-based access to 21st century communications and inclusive economic growth, and in turn between inclusive economic development and human rights. We know that human rights do not begin after breakfast. People need both. Without breakfast, few people have the energy to make full use of their rights. And after breakfast, they need both political and economic freedom to build profitable businesses and peaceful societies.

What does that mean in practice? It means the U.S. government is involved in a wide range of Information & Communication Technology development efforts from a variety of different agencies, from USAID to the National Science Foundation.

As a first step, companies, governments and civil society groups are starting to come together to work on this crucial issue. The goal is to find ways to achieve the UN target of providing entry-level broadband service for less than 5% of average monthly income. We recognize that governments have a role to play in creating the right incentives, ensuring healthy market competition, and supporting investment and continued infrastructure development that brings the Internet and mobile technology to more people in more places.

On the openness side, we have expanded our funding for Internet freedom advocacy and programming, for which the US Congress has allocated \$100 million since 2008 to projects that provide technologies and knowledge to millions of people whose freedoms online are repressed. We are thrilled to be launching at this conference the Digital Defenders partnership, an unprecedented collaboration among governments to provide support for digital activists under threat.

But just as we support individuals who are targeted every day for exercising their rights online, we are conscious of a broader threat to the future of Internet openness. Right now, in various international forums, some countries are working to change how the Internet is governed. They want to replace the current multi-stakeholder approach, which supports the free flow of information in a global network, and includes governments, the private sector, and citizens. In its place, they aim to impose a system that expands control over Internet resources, institutions, and content, and centralizes that control in the hands of governments. These debates will play out in forums over the next few months and years.

The United States supports preserving and deepening the current multi-stakeholder approach because it brings together the best of governments, the private sector and civil society to

manage the network, and it works. The multi-stakeholder system has kept the Internet up and running for years, all over the world. We want the next generation of Internet users -- whether small business owners or independent journalists -- to be involved in shaping the future of the platform.

That next generation of users will not just be in the United States. Many of them will be here in Africa. That is why we need to ensure that stakeholders in Africa and the rest of the developing world are able to participate in the various multi-stakeholder forums where Internet governance issues are decided. And that is why we value our partnership with the governments of the Coalition and welcome Kenya's leadership, which leads by example in demonstrating that the right way to foster both access and openness -- to harness the potential of these new technologies -- is through inclusion and collaboration with everyone in this room.

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