



**HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION**

**19th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Geneva (Switzerland)**

29 February 2012

**Panel discussion
Freedom of expression on the Internet**

Human Rights House Foundation statement

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Thank you, Madam Chairperson,

The Human Rights House Foundation would like to thank the High Commissioner for her opening statement and the panellists for their interventions. We applaud the Human Rights Council for organising this panel and deeply hope the Council will continue its work on freedom of expression on the Internet. We welcome the objectives and recommendations of the panel.

The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression is a source of information and provides important analysis in his reports of last year both to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. Other intergovernmental organisations, such as the Council of Europe, are also a source for the Council's work on this topic.

We echo the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression's concerns regarding the vulnerability of people expressing critical opinions on the Internet. Individuals face serious implications including interrogation¹, arrest and imprisonment for expressing their view on the Internet, both on social media and with more traditional tools. Worrying trends are the actions taken against critical voices expressed through informal media on the Internet, such as Facebook and online blogs. We are especially concerned by the persecution faced by bloggers and social platform users in the South Caucasus, where a 20 year old man was imprisoned in relation to critical comments posted on his

¹ "Russian authorities aim to control independent media ahead of election?":
<http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17634.html>.

personal Facebook site². In another case, two bloggers were imprisoned for 16 months in response to their online activity.³

The panel's discussion on freedom of access to the Internet and its contents also reflects problems of Internet censorship. In Eastern Europe, individuals wishing to access the Internet via public computers are being required to submit identification, so that authorities can track their Internet searches.⁴ Censorship of Internet content is extremely problematic, including in cases such as the crashing of Internet monitoring group's websites⁵ or the blocking of public health websites that contradict government policy⁶.

The Human Rights House Foundation would also like to remind the panel and the Council about the Internet Governance Forum, which will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in September of this year. The 2011 Forum focused on the role of Internet as a catalyst for change. We encourage the Human Rights Council to follow-up on the 2012 Forum and call upon governments to respect Internet freedoms.

We wanted to highlight the far reach of Internet monitoring and the gravity of the challenges we face in promoting the protection of freedom of expression on the Internet. We therefore support the panel's recommendation for governments to ensure greater accessibility to the Internet and its contents.

Thank you.

² "Azerbaijan releases young activist": <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17464.html>.

³ "Azerbaijani bloggers released": <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/15605.html>.

⁴ "Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: worrying trends in 2012": <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17584.html>.

⁵ "Russia: Strongly condemns arrests of protesters":
<http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17397.html>.

⁶ "Russian government blocks public health organization's website":
<http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17606.html>.