**A denunciation of Internet Shutdown: Civil Society Statement**

The recent past has witnessed internet shutdowns in several countries ranging from Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya and Uganda. These disruptions flout on people’s fundamental right to receive and disseminate information to others, and especially their families and loved ones during emergencies. As civil society actors, shutdowns are an indication of early warning of human rights violations often state-sponsored. Evidence obtained from OpenNet[[1]](#footnote-1) shows that most governments’ primary motivation for blocking of content is always political rather than moral or cultural.

In many of the instances, government reasons for shutdowns are always ambiguous and unclear. Some of the countries have used ‘national security’ as the *raison d'être[[2]](#footnote-2)*for the shutdowns. However, the term has been loosely defined in many contexts creating a room for manoeuvring and misuse of the law. This has been the case in Democratic Republic of Congo where the Telecommunication Law Framework permits the national government to ban the use of “telecommunications facilities, in full or part…if the government deems it fit, in the interests of public security or national defence…”. In our opinion, laws that are focused on blocking or shutting down, or restricted access of internet access contradict the freedom of expression embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Such laws ought to be reformed to reflect human rights frameworks.

In nearly all cases of shutdowns, telecommunications companies are forced to execute government orders to cut off internet access yet most of these countries national laws do not spell out decrees allowing the government to take control of communication networks during emergencies and even so this is not well outlined.

We are concerned that the communication technologies have become an important part and parcel of people in all angles of life, that is business, educations, academics, researchers, and healthcare, and as such shutdown affects normal functioning of people’s lives. The internet is contributing to higher levels of social benefit and inclusion, providing innovative and new-flanged avenues for citizens, businesses and even government to shared knowledge and participate in vital aspects of their areas of work.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Firstly, we assert that limitations or shutdown of the internet in most cases does not achieve its intended objective, if at all there is any valid reason. In most cases, it is only intrusive and does not prevent targeted users from accessing the information; in fact sometimes it assists those to whom it is used against.

Private sector entities that are involved in internet-related issues should also join the civil society in condemning instances of shutdown and work towards promoting principles that promote free access of the internet.

We conclude that most of the laws developed are always based on vague, arbitrary laws usually unknown to the public and drawn up by unaccountable bodies and is seriously lacking in due process when applied as prevention-with exclusion of stakeholders, notification and a right to object to blocking. In view of this, we do not support any form of internet shutdown.

We therefore believe that adoption of the recommendations set forthwith would to a great extent reinforce and fortify efforts to increase internet connectivity in Africa and the capacity of the internet to support human rights agenda.

Internet shutdowns affect confidence in use of information communication technologies that are deemed necessary for the development of the information societies that in the long run affect economic and social innovations.

1. “Internet Filtering in Burma in 2005: A Country Study,” OpenNet Initiative, October 2005. (accessed November 7th, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In this reason, it has been used to mean reason [↑](#footnote-ref-2)