

Activists warn G-8 against Web restrictions

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French President Nicolas Sarkozy, left, greets founder and Chief Executive Officer of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg at the Elysee Palace, in Paris, Wednesday, May 25, 2011. (AP Photo/Bob Edme)

(AP) -- Internet activists and digital entrepreneurs warned Wednesday that if global leaders attempt to limit access to the Web, their restrictions will be bypassed and they will become irrelevant.

The stark message adds to growing resistance - from big name companies like [Google](#) and Twitter to anonymous Internet vigilantes who have attacked government censorship networks - against creeping laws that might one day restrict services many users now take for granted.

Leaders of the Group of Eight most powerful countries begin meeting in France on Thursday to discuss issues of global concern in the wake of the Arab uprising that have been described as the first Internet-enabled revolutions.

"G-8 governments should say very clearly for once that Internet access is a fundamental human right," said Jean-Francois Julliard, who heads free speech group [Reporters without Borders](#).

Julliard said more than 60 countries now have some form of [Internet censorship](#) in place, and that number is growing.

Tony Wang, Twitter's general manager for Europe, said attempts to crack down on free expression are self-defeating.

He declined to discuss attempts in Britain to enforce the country's strict privacy law against users of the micro-blogging site. But Wang told a panel in Paris that "the response to bad speech should be more speech."

Earlier this year, [Twitter](#) teamed up with Google to create a service allowing Egyptians to post messages on the Internet even after the government had cut Web access in an effort to quell street protests.

"We take that open communication channel for granted at our peril," Google's regional policy director Susan Pointer said.

Support for unrestricted Web access also came from the U.S. government. Alec Ross, a special adviser to U.S. Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton](#), said Washington recently spent \$28 million training [democracy activists](#) to use tools that allow them to bypass online filters.

With users become more sophisticated and technology allowing them to establish autonomous networks outside of government control, some at

the meeting said authorities are fighting a losing battle.

"Government in many ways is absolutely going to, if not already has, become irrelevant," said Shervin Pishevar, the chief executive of California-based SGN, which invests in social and mobile gaming companies. "It's not going to be in control anymore with the technologies that are coming down the pipe."

That message may not be welcomed by all G-8 leaders. Their host, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, had convened Internet mavens in Paris on Tuesday to argue that the online world needs more real-world regulation.

Maurice Levy, tasked by Sarkozy with organizing what was billed as the first "e-G-8" conference, said participants hoped leaders would heed their objection to greater government interference.

"If it just changes (views) by two degrees it will be a huge victory," said Levy, the chief executive of France's ad agency Publicis Groupe SA.

Asked what she would tell the G-8, activist Nadine Wahab said the lesson from the successful uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia should be: "Leave the Internet alone."

"It doesn't belong either to companies, nor the governments nor the G-8," she said.

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