

UN rights chief voices concern over Internet restrictions

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UN Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay in Geneva on February 27. Pillay on Wednesday expressed concern about Internet restrictions and the arbitrary detention of bloggers.

United Nations human rights chief Navi Pillay on Wednesday expressed concern about Internet restrictions and the arbitrary detention of bloggers.

"The Internet has become an indispensable tool for people to receive information beyond that prepared and disseminated by traditional mass media," said Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Speaking at a panel discussion during a Human Rights Council session, Pillay, a former judge, noted that websites are blocked in many countries, sometimes "during specific periods of political significance".

"Bloggers and human rights defenders who legitimately exercise their right to freedom of expression continue to be arbitrarily arrested, tortured and unjustly sentenced to imprisonment on the pretext of protecting national security or countering terrorism," she said.

Pillay added that "we have also witnessed how courageous individuals strategically used the Internet to mobilise and support others in demanding their human rights".

She said human rights defenders have used audio-visual and crowd-sourcing platforms that the Internet offers to document [human rights violations](#) and share them in real time with a global audience.

It was not surprising that this resulted in a backlash and intensified attempts to restrict access to online content or the Internet.

The UN rights chief recognised that the Internet can be used for criminal activities and said what it carries is not always verifiable, noting there is a need to combat criminal activities that abuse the Internet.

But she said "there is also a real concern that methods to identify and track down criminals may be used to crack down on [human rights](#) defenders, suppress dissenting voices and withhold 'inconvenient' information".

She also noted that there are "well-intended legislative initiatives" such as those to protect [intellectual property rights](#), "which impose onerous obligations" and "could thereby stifle freedom of information".

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