

89 nations sign controversial UN telecom treaty

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Pope Benedict XVI sends his first twitter message at the Vatican this week. A controversial new global treaty on telecom regulations was signed on Friday by 89 International Telecommunication Union member states despite US objections to potential regulation of the Internet.

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"I say to the 89 states that signed today the treaty, thank you," said Mohamed al-Ghanim, chairman of the World Conference on International Telecommunication (WICT-12), organised by the ITU in Dubai.

Fifty-five countries did not sign the treaty, he said.

"I hope that the 55 states that said do not want to sign the treaty, or need to hold consultations, to think again," about the treaty that enters effect in January 2015, said Ghanim, who is the chief of the UAE's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority.

The treaty that is the first update to the International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs) agreed in 1988, stirred controversy as Internet operators, activists and countries led by the United States objected to reference to the Internet deemed to be paving the way for [government control](#).

But the ITU chief Hamadoun Toure insisted on Friday that the treaty had nothing to do with the Internet, despite a non-binding resolution calling for action to promote Internet growth.



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"This conference was not about the [Internet control](#) or Internet governance, and indeed there are no provisions on the Internet," the ITU secretary general told participants at the signing ceremony.

The United States on Thursday slammed the treaty saying that the proposed text opened the door to [government regulation](#) of the Internet.

The non-binding resolution on the Internet, recognises, among other things, that "all governments should have an equal role and responsibility for international Internet governance and for ensuring the stability, security and continuity of the existing Internet and its future development and of the [future Internet](#)," according to the text.

"This conference has no effect on the Internet at all," Toure told reporters earlier, insisting that the treaty gives explicit protection to free speech.

"In the preamble, we have a special article," he said. "Member states affirm their commitment to implement these regulations in a manner that respects and upholds their human rights obligations."

But the head of the US delegation, Terry Kramer, said on Thursday that he could not sign the treaty as currently drafted because it included some language "seeking to insert governmental control over Internet governance."

"The US has consistently believed and continues to believe that the (UN treaty) should not extend to Internet governance or content," he added.

US lawmakers had voted unanimously to oppose any efforts to give the United Nations new authority to regulate the Internet, and a variety of Internet activists and US firms, led by Google, also warned against new regulations.

Internet giant Google, which has been vocal in criticising the conference, said that many governments taking part in the meeting in Dubai proved that they wanted increased censorship, and it supported countries rejecting the treaty.

"What is clear from the ITU meeting in Dubai is that many governments want to increase regulation and censorship of the Internet," a Google spokesperson said in a statement.

"We stand with the countries who refuse to sign this treaty and also with the millions of voices who have joined us to support a free and open web," the spokesperson added.

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