

Clinton renews push for open Internet access

February 15 2011, by Lachlan Carmichael



US Secretary Hillary Clinton speaks on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Clinton is renewing her push for the free and open use of the Internet as protesters from Egypt to Iran have used it to demand political freedoms.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton renews her push Tuesday for the free and open use of the Internet, which protesters from Egypt to Iran have used to demand political freedoms.

In excerpts of a speech to be delivered in Washington, the chief US diplomat said the question of what people do online and what principles they follow is one that "becomes more urgent every day."

The United States supports the "freedoms of expression, assembly, and association online" -- what she calls the "freedom to connect" -- and urges other nations to embrace those freedoms.

Washington is also committed to protecting civil liberties and human

rights in [cyberspace](#) and is "determined to track and stop terrorism and criminal activity online and offline," Clinton says in her speech on "Internet rights and wrongs."

"We are convinced that an [open Internet](#) fosters long-term peace, progress and prosperity," she continued.

But her prepared remarks warned that governments that block, censor or punish [Internet activity](#) can "cut off opportunities for peace and progress and discourage innovation and entrepreneurship."

"History has shown us that repression often sows the seeds for revolution down the road," she said.

"Those who clamp down on Internet freedom may be able to hold back the full impact of their people's yearnings for a while, but not forever."

She said leaders worldwide can open up to the Internet and perhaps see its content increase the demand for political rights or they can block it and risk losing all the economic and social benefits that come with it.

"The United States will continue to promote an Internet where people's rights are protected and that is open to innovation, is interoperable all over the world, secure enough to hold people's trust and reliable enough to support their work," Clinton added.

US diplomats and development experts now work daily to monitor and respond to threats to [Internet freedom](#).

A State Department official said Clinton's speech at George Washington University will tackle the role of 21st century communication technologies in recent events in the Middle East and efforts by some countries to curtail their "people's freedom to connect."

International and local Iranian media were banned from freely covering the massive wave of protest sparked by the disputed June 2009 re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

But Iranians overcame the reporting ban by using social-networking and image-sharing websites such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr despite efforts by local officials to cut off mobile phones and the Internet.

On Sunday the US State Department began sending Twitter messages to Iranians in Farsi.

On the Twitter account, USAdarFarsi, the State Department said it "recognizes historic role of social media among Iranians We want to join in your conversations."

In another tweet, the State Department said: "Iran has shown that the activities it praised Egyptians for it sees as illegal, illegitimate for its own people."

Relaying information and keeping the international spotlight on events, Internet users played a key role in groundbreaking mass protests in Tunisia that forced president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to flee last month after 23 years in power.

Within days, Egyptians quickly mobilized pro-democracy protests through Facebook pages and Twitter messages. After 18 days of mass protests, Hosni Mubarak stepped down last week after three decades as president of Egypt.

In Bahrain, police used tear gas Monday to disperse hundreds of protesters whose gathering had been arranged on the Internet.

In a speech on Internet freedoms in January 2010, Clinton urged China to conduct a thorough probe into cyberattacks on Google and other US companies, pressing technology firms to resist Internet censorship.

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