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UN to Seek Internet Kill Switch Next Month, Documents Show

As Americans focused on the U.S. presidential election, the United Nations and a wide swath of its autocratic member regimes were drafting a plan to give a little-known UN agency control over the online world. Among the most contentious schemes: a plot to hand the International Telecommunication Union a so-called “kill switch” for the Internet that critics say would be used to smash free speech.



The ITU’s proposals to “reform” the Internet, drafted in secret and quietly [published online last week](#), revealed a broad plan to rein in what, up until now, has been a largely unregulated tool allowing people all over the world to freely express their views at little to no cost financially. Unlike dictatorships such as the communist regime ruling over mainland China and the governments of Muslim-dominated countries, most Western-style governments have been unable or unwilling to regulate the Web apart from minor restrictions on subjects such as child pornography and the like.

However, that could all change soon — at least if the UN and its tyrannical member states get their way, with a broad coalition of Islamist autocrats and communist despots joining forces to quash freedom of expression for everyone. Representatives from almost 200 governments and dictatorships will be meeting behind closed doors next month at the “World Conference on International Telecommunications” (WCIT) in the United Arab Emirates to discuss handing complete control over the Internet to the ITU.

Last week, the UN and the dictatorship ruling Azerbaijan hosted the so-called “Internet Governance Forum” (IGF) in Baku under the banner of “Internet Governance for Sustainable Human, Economic, and Social Development.” Critics [slammed](#) the forum, the notion of “Internet Governance,” and especially the host regime, known for its barbaric repression of free speech. But while no binding decisions were made there, UN leaders and despots from around the world took the opportunity to prepare for the upcoming ITU summit in Dubai.

The widely condemned ITU plan calls for reforms that would stifle free speech, regulate social media, force Internet users to pay “fees” for services like Skype and e-mail, and much more. Among the chief problems cited by analysts is a plan to allow UN members — mostly dictatorships — to demand that the ITU shut down content they do not approve of. The scheme would also create a global Internet surveillance regime while permitting governments to restrict or block online information. Anonymity on the Web would become a thing of the past, too.

Incredibly, the controversial plan would also purport to allow governments to shut down the Web if they claimed it could “interfere” in the internal affairs of other UN member regimes. On top of that, dictators and increasingly authoritarian governments all over the world would be able to shut down the Internet if there were a risk that “sensitive” information could be shared — essentially a blank check that would allow any despot or government to kill the Web if their criminality were about to be exposed. In other



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words, the UN, widely blasted and ridiculed as a “dictators club,” would have a “kill switch” over the Internet.

Of course, Internet freedom activists, communications firms, and civil liberties organizations around the world are up in arms about the UN’s latest shadowy effort to impose the heavy hand of government control on the World Wide Web. Earlier this week, a broad coalition that included Google [met in London](#) to demand that the UN put a halt to the scheme, calling on the global entity to allow the debate to expand beyond governments and to postpone any decision on the plot until all stakeholders have a chance to weigh in.

Google free expression and international relations chief Ross LaJeunesse, a member of the U.S. delegation to the ITU treaty-writing conference next month, [said](#) the UN schemes are a “real threat to the future of the net as we know it today.” Warning that the secretive ITU is a terrible vehicle to address Internet issues because only governments are allowed to participate, he also said despotic rulers of nations like Russia, Syria, Iran, and others would abuse any potential new Internet regime to further terrorize and oppress the citizenry.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association, meanwhile, is [calling](#) on the government of Canada to veto the UN scheme outright. “In Canada we have many protections that ensure our freedom of speech is protected. In that regard we are lucky, but in other parts of the world, governments look for more ways to watch public opinion and monitor dissent,” said CCLA public safety programs Director Abby Dushman. “Freedom of expression is a basic human right and we would urge the countries that vote on this proposal to keep that in mind. Any proposal to control the Internet in any way, shape or form beyond the accepted laws of sovereign countries should be opposed outright.”

In the United States, numerous heavyweights have spoken out as well. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) member Robert McDowell, for example, warned delegates to beware of even seemingly small or innocent-sounding changes to the ITU treaties. Former CEO Dr. Paul Twomey of the U.S. body in charge of online domain names and addresses, the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), also [urged caution](#) and a vigorous defense of a free and open Internet.

Separately, International Trade Union Confederation General Secretary Sharran Burrow [called for](#) urgent worldwide resistance to protect the Internet from the UN threat. “Unless we act now, our right to freely communicate and share information could change forever,” she said, noting that big telecommunications companies had teamed up with the regimes ruling China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other nations that restrict online freedom.

“So far, the proposal has flown under the radar, but its implications are extremely serious,” Burrow added, referring to the ITU plot to take over the online world. “Governments and big companies the world over may end up with the right not only to restrict the internet and monitor everything you do online but to charge users for services such as email and Skype.”

U.S. Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), meanwhile, [stated in his farewell speech to Congress](#) this week that the free Internet would be essential to spreading truth and the ideas of liberty as America enters into a period fraught with government threats to liberty and prosperity. “The Internet will provide the alternative to the government-media complex that controls the news and most political propaganda,” he said. “This is why it’s essential that the Internet remains free of government regulation.”

Numerous Western governments have suggested they will oppose the growing coalition of totalitarian-minded regimes seeking to “govern” the Internet — an alliance that includes some mega-corporations



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as well as a motley assortment of African despots, Islamist tyrants, communist autocracies, and even socialistic powers such as the governments ruling Brazil and India. The Obama administration, however, while claiming to support a free Internet despite repeated unconstitutional power grabs aimed at increasing federal power over the Web, has warned Americans not to criticize the deeply controversial global entity.

Speaking at the American Enterprise Institute, U.S. Ambassador Terry Kramer also said it was “important” for the U.S. government to participate in the controversial discussions and that it had to address the supposed concerns of various despotic regimes. “Our messages need to be issues-orientated and fact-orientated — not taking shots at the U.N., not taking shots at leadership,” he [said](#).

However, despite the controversial comments, Kramer did say the U.S. government would seek to prevent any UN curbs on free speech or excessive regulation. “We need to avoid suffocating the Internet space through well-meaning but overly prescriptive proposals that would seek to control content or seek to mandate routing and payment practices,” the ambassador [claimed](#). “That would send the Internet back to a circuit switch era that is actually passing in history.”

Experts and analysts said that rather than expanding the ITU regulatory regime, the conference should focus on [abolishing](#) existing international regulations over telecommunications. But with tyrants of all persuasions salivating at the potential opportunity to quash Internet freedom at the global level, the battle, for now at least, will likely surround preserving the online liberty that currently exists — quite possibly, according to activists, one of the keys to ensuring the survival of freedom.

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