



**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION



March 27, 2012

Dear Representative Smith:

We write in strong support of H.R. 3605, the Global Online Freedom Act of 2011. This bill is an important tool in preventing repressive governments from enlisting U.S. companies in their effort to transform the Internet into a tool of surveillance and repression.

The Internet is an incredible tool for communication, but as some governments have discovered, it is also an effective tool for censorship and oppression. Many repressive countries, including China and Iran, among others, are transforming the Internet into a powerful and effective tool to silence political and religious speech and to track down those who are fighting for freedom.

We have witnessed an increase in the arrests and detentions of bloggers, the blocking of websites, online intimidation and surveillance of peaceful political activists, and aggressive denial of service attacks against websites that promote the free flow of legitimate political and religious speech.

We value the promotion of Internet freedom because it derives from universal and cherished rights—the freedoms of speech, assembly, and association. An open Internet gives people a platform from which to express their legitimate aspirations and to hold their governments accountable. We believe that people in every country deserve to be able to take part in building a more peaceful, prosperous, and democratic society, and H.R. 3605 will help promote a more open and free Internet.

By moving quickly to pass the Global Online Freedom Act, the U.S. Congress can send a powerful message to dictators around the globe that we will not idly stand by while fundamental freedoms are eroded online. Thank you for introducing this important legislation and we look forward to supporting its passage.

Sincerely,

Initiatives for China

Beijing Spring

Yibao

New Hope Foundation

China Rights Network

The Alliance of the Guard of Canadian Values

Federation for a Democratic China

Uyghur American Association

Princeton China Initiative

China Truth Foundation

China Free Press

Laogai Research Foundation

Reporters Without Borders



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [Mary McGuire](#) in Washington, +1-202-747-7035

Freedom House Endorses Global Online Freedom Act

Washington – December 8, 2011 –

Freedom House supports the Global Online Freedom Act (GOFA) 2.0, which was introduced today in the U.S. Congress as H.R. 3605. The bill, which would hinder the ability of U.S. companies to sell surveillance and censorship technologies to repressive governments, is crucial to the promotion of global internet freedom.

“U.S. companies are reported to have sold technologies for monitoring digital communications and censoring online content to repressive governments in the Middle East and elsewhere,” said Daniel Calingaert, vice president for policy and external relations at Freedom House. “GOFA is the first serious legislative proposal to stop sales of U.S. technology that is used to violate human rights.”

The bill would prohibit exports of surveillance and censorship technologies to countries that restrict the internet. It would also require U.S. technology companies to disclose their policies for collecting and sharing personal data and for blocking access to online content.

“The explosive growth of social media and internet use generally is being met by increasingly sophisticated forms of repression,” said Sanja Kelly, project director for *Freedom on the Net* at Freedom House. “More and more governments are eavesdropping on the communications of human rights activists and restricting internet users’ access to information, such as independent news websites and peaceful online political discussions.”

For more information, visit:

[Freedom on the Net 2011](#) [Foreign Policy: Hacking the Revolution](#) [Growing Challenges to Internet Freedom](#)

Freedom House is an independent watchdog organization that supports democratic change, monitors the status of freedom around the world, and advocates for democracy and human rights.

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March 13, 2012

Representative Chris Smith
2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Smith,

We write in strong support of H.R. 3605, the Global Online Freedom Act of 2011. This bill is an important tool in preventing repressive governments from enlisting U.S. companies in their effort to transform the Internet into a tool of surveillance and repression.

The Internet is an incredible tool for communication, but as some governments have discovered, it is also an effective tool for censorship and oppression. Many repressive countries, including China and Iran, among others, are transforming the Internet into a powerful and effective tool to silence political and religious speech and to track down those who are fighting for freedom. Even more worrying, is that these methods of repression are spreading. Countries like Vietnam and Thailand are increasing their efforts to censor content or identify internet users exercising their rights to free expression or assembly.

We have witnessed an increase in the arrests and detentions of bloggers, the blocking of websites, online intimidation and surveillance of peaceful political activists, and aggressive denial of service attacks against websites that promote the free flow of legitimate political and religious speech. As witnessed during the Arab Spring, the internet has the ability to allow billions of people to exercise their rights of speech, assembly, and association. But an open internet is not guaranteed. Governments, companies, and civil society must be vigilant to ensure that the internet is a platform that people can use to express their legitimate aspirations and to hold their governments accountable. People in every country deserve to be able to take part in building a more peaceful, prosperous, and democratic society, and H.R. 3605 will help promote a more open and free Internet.

The Global Online Freedom Act would require companies to demonstrate that they have put policies and procedures in place to protect human rights online and to safeguard their users. Such mechanisms are particularly pertinent given the role of the U.S. Internet firm Yahoo in turning over to the Chinese government user information which led to the arrest, conviction and 10-year prison term of the journalist Shi Tao in 2005 on a charge of "divulging state secrets abroad." It would strengthen

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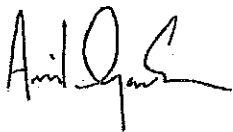
www.hrw.org

efforts by the US government to protect internet freedom by giving the government new resources to keep the internet open and give it new authority to ensure that certain technologies do not fall into the hands of repressive governments.

Finally, it would level the playing field for responsible businesses by ensuring that US trade negotiations protect freedom of expression and thereby allowing innovative companies to fairly compete, especially in countries where governments try to censor their products or services. These are modest, but critical steps needed to help keep the internet open.

By moving quickly to pass the Global Online Freedom Act, the U.S. Congress can send a powerful message to dictators around the globe that we will not idly stand by while fundamental freedoms are eroded online. Thank you for introducing this important legislation and we look forward to supporting its passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arvind Ganesan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Arvind Ganesan
Director, Business and Human Rights Division
Human Rights Watch



March 26, 2012

Honorable Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress
US House of Representatives

Dear Representative Smith:

I write on behalf of the United States section of Amnesty International in strong support of H.R. 3605, the Global Online Freedom Act of 2011. We consider this bill to be an important tool in preventing repressive governments from enlisting U.S. companies in efforts to use the Internet as a tool of surveillance and repression.

The Internet is an incredible tool for communication, but as some governments have demonstrated, it can also be used for censorship and oppression. Many repressive governments, including those of China and Iran, among others, are attempting to transform the Internet into a tool to track down those who are fighting for freedom and to silence political and religious speech.

Amnesty International has documented arrests and detentions of bloggers, the blocking of websites, online intimidation and surveillance of peaceful political activists, and aggressive denial of service attacks against websites that promote the free flow of legitimate political and religious speech.

We value the promotion of Internet freedom because it derives from universal and cherished rights—the freedoms of speech, assembly, and association. An open Internet gives people a platform from which to express their legitimate aspirations and to hold their governments accountable. We believe that people in every country deserve to be able to take part in building a more peaceful, prosperous, and democratic society, and we consider a more open and free Internet to be an important tool that can be used to achieve this end.

By moving quickly to pass the Global Online Freedom Act, the U.S. Congress can send a powerful message around the globe that the United States will not idly stand by while fundamental freedoms are eroded online. Thank you for introducing this important legislation. We look forward to supporting its passage.

Sincerely,

T. Kumar
International Advocacy Director
Amnesty International USA



MOBILIZING
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DIGITAL
FREEDOM

27 March 2012

Dear Representative Smith:

We write in support of H.R. 3605, the Global Online Freedom Act of 2011. This bill is an important tool in preventing repressive governments from enlisting U.S. companies in their efforts to transform the Internet into a tool of surveillance and repression.

The Internet is an extraordinary tool for communication, but as some governments have discovered, it is also an effective mechanism for censorship and oppression. Many countries, including China and Iran, among others, are transforming the Internet into a powerful and effective tool to silence political and religious speech and to track down those who are fighting for freedom. While such technologies were once limited to repressive states, this "worst practice" in curtailing the rights of users is spreading, from Thailand to India to Syria to Venezuela, as more governments seek out questionable censorship and surveillance programs.

We have witnessed an increase in the arrests and detentions of bloggers, the blocking of websites, online intimidation and surveillance of peaceful political activists, and aggressive denial of service attacks against websites that promote the free flow of political and religious speech and association.

While civil society has had some success through public campaigning, and the media has exposed the trade through thorough reporting, government efforts have been thwarted by the efforts of other governments who would use censorship and surveillance technologies to abuse their citizens' rights. However, it is clear that a more comprehensive and holistic regulatory approach is needed.

Critical to this effort is the bill's provisions requiring greater transparency in the companies that operate in this censorship and surveillance technology sector. **However we maintain two important reservations about the current draft of the bill.**

Firstly, while the draft of H.R. 3605 being introduced today (on March 27th, 2012) continues to improve on previous iterations, we urge Congress to demand this kind of accountability from all companies in the sector, while being mindful that the bill's provisions do not ensnare lightweight technologies that will actually help activists or sanction "dual use" technologies in onerous amounts of licensing procedures. Ill-conceived regulation may actually hurt activists while enabling their oppressors, as we have seen when governments "over sanction".

Secondly, we encourage Congress to engage a multistakeholder body comprised of relevant government officials, internet companies, and human rights organizations to



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assist in identifying which countries are "internet restrictive." The sanctions process in the United States has historically been prone to politicization, often placing certain countries in the 'bad' list, while turning a blind eye to other countries, which should be treated with equal suspicion. A multistakeholder body could instrumentally advise the US government both in terms of the countries and technologies should be sanctioned to achieve the greater realization of internet freedom and digital rights around the world. Having greater impartiality and uniformity from which to judge all countries, not just those designated as "internet restricting" and technologies would be a useful step forward.

By moving to pass the Global Online Freedom Act, the U.S. Congress can send a powerful message to governments around the globe that it will not idly stand by while fundamental freedoms are eroded online. Rightly, it should also require the U.S. government as a major customer of these technologies to push for greater vendor accountability and transparency.

We look forward to working with Congress to ensure that the effectiveness of any legislation is maximized while unintended consequences are avoided and thank Congressman Smith for his leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Brett Solomon
Executive Director
Access | AccessNow.org

Access (<https://www.accessnow.org>) is a global movement for digital freedom premised on the belief that the realization of human rights in the 21st century is increasingly dependent on access to the internet and other forms of technology. For more information contact press@accessnow.org or call Blair at 202-503-6141