

Opinion

Lessons from Canada: Everyone deserves Internet

The heading is clear. Recently, there have been Internet blackouts in several countries. Such a violation cannot happen in Canada. Internet access is considered a human right that everyone must enjoy. Unless otherwise stated, no one has the power—whether out of discretion or desperation—to disconnect or turn off the Internet for any purpose, except under circumstances explicitly provided for by law. Under Bill C-8, the Minister of Communications is strictly allowed to order an Internet shutdown only if there are “reasonable grounds to believe that it is necessary to do so to secure the Canadian telecommunications system against any threat, including interference, manipulation, disruption or degradation.”

According to the Government of Canada website, “the rights and freedoms that individuals have offline must also be protected online. Canada is committed to working with international partners to protect Internet freedom, includ-

ly violating their rights but is also committing an offence. Why has Internet become a human right in Canada?

The answer is simple. Internet is not a choice or a favour; it is an essential tool for life. The health of any nation can be measured by its freedom of information. People use the Internet to conduct business, communicate, study, and more. Whoever impinges on the right to access the Internet adversely affects the lives and rights of millions. Internet clampdowns not only expose a society's primitiveness and insensitivity but can also lead to criminal and civil liabilities.

Canadian leaders avoid such liabilities because failing to do so could cost them their positions. Any tort liability resulting from such an act legally obliges the government to redress the victims, and the costs come from taxpayers. By violating this right, a person automatically loses credibility as a competent leader and may be removed for abuses of public funds, callousness, negligence, or criminality. This is what competent and good governance looks like.

Contrast this with my country, Tanzania. During controversial elections, internet access was shut down while the incumbent President claimed a 98 percent victory. If this were a fair and square win, it would stand as a world record—one that even raises doubts about its legitimacy. During these elections, internet clampdowns prevented scrutiny that could have endangered national security, which in practice revolves around the powers of the President.

In some places, internet control is not just a policy tool but a weapon. Hackers and manipulators can use it to disrupt or even overturn outcomes that the state seeks to secure. The absence of internet safeguards can therefore affect not only democratic processes but also personal liberties.

In Toronto, the internet is recognised as a human right because it enables citizens to exercise their freedoms and hold power to account.

By contrast, in parts of Africa, cyberspace is still treated as a privilege or a tool of control. Until internet access is guaranteed as a right across the continent, citizens will remain vulnerable to political manipulation and the suppression of basic freedoms.

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Internet

ing the rights to online freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as well as to protect privacy online.” Canadians therefore enjoy both the right of access to the Internet and protection of that access.

In Canada, it is not at the discretion of the government or any institution to censor, disconnect, or selectively provide Internet access. It is treated like water and other essential amenities. Anyone—whether an individual or the government—who denies Canadians this right is not on-

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