# A Day for Free Expression, Online and Off

December 10, 2012

Human Rights Day [1] commemorates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [2] (UDHR), adopted on December 10, 1948. This year, the UN has placed a spotlight on the rights of all people "to make their voices heard in public life and be included in political decision-making," a theme particularly relevant to the Internet and the civic power derived from peoples' abilities to communicate and interact using new media.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

It is remarkable that the authors of the UDHR had the foresight to protect this freedom regardless of medium – we know today just how relevant Article 19 is for the digital age. In the web 2.0 era, a right to "impart" information and ideas takes on new meaning, as social networking sites and blogging platforms support user-generated content and allow anyone with Internet access to disseminate ideas and opinions. Similarly, the rights to "seek" and "receive" information seem to anticipate search engines, Twitter feeds, and other Internet services.

Digital rights advocates around the world routinely use the UDHR and other key documents when urging that governments must uphold Internet users' human rights – particularly rights to privacy, freedom of expression and access to information online – if they want to preserve and protect the open web.

If we want to reap all the civic, educational, political, and economic benefits of an open Internet, human rights must be baked into the technology and the policies that govern its use from the very beginning. A careful implementation of these rights in open, transparent forums where all relevant stakeholders – technology and law experts, companies, governments, and human rights advocates – are empowered to participate is imperative to maintaining an open, innovative Internet.

From SOPA to ACTA to WCIT, we've seen people around the world demanding open and transparent policymaking processes where their voices, opinions, and expertise can have an impact in ongoing debates about the future of the web. Today's theme of making people's voices heard should reinforce these calls for openness and remind all Internet stakeholders of the power of civic engagement in the digital era.

The content through out this website that originates with CDT can be freely copied and used as long as you make no substantive changes and clearly give us credit. Details.
Copyright © 2013 by Center for Democracy & Technology.
**Source URL:** https://cdt.org/blogs/ellery-biddle/1012day-free-expression-online-and

**Links:**
[1] http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/
[2] http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml