Ethics of Internet Freedom Promotion
Welcome to the World of Human Rights:
Please Make Yourself Uncomfortable

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Internet Freedom

Internet freedom tools

• Censorship circumvention
• Online anonymity
• Anti-surveillance
An analogy

Humanitarian aid groups provide food, shelter, medical care, to people in conflict zones, in economic poverty, or living under repressive governments.

Internet freedom groups provide uncensored Internet, online anonymity to people in conflict zones, in information poverty, or living under repressive governments.

➡️ Lots of soul-searching about ethics of aid

➡️ ???
Open Internet as Human Right

“Everyone has the right to [...] food, clothing, housing and medical care”

- UDHR (Article 25)

“Everyone has the right to [...] seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”

- UDHR (Article 19)
Ethics of human rights promotion

- Impartiality
- Impact
- Consent
- Cultural norms
- ...

In the paper
Impartiality

Impartiality demands giving food, shelter, medical care to those on “both sides” of a conflict.

Giving supplies to both sides can:
- sustain a conflict
- lead to outcome that is worse for HRs

Should Internet freedom organizations give support to “both sides” in a conflict? Pick sides?

If orgs do pick sides, what is the basis for their decision?
Impact

Measuring impact is important for donors and for self-evaluation.

Orgs often pick metrics that are easy to measure:
- # of bags of food distributed
- $ spent

→ These metrics don’t measure hunger, health, or effectiveness

How should Internet freedom organizations measure impact?

What does a positive “Internet freedom” outcome look like?

more users ≠ internet freedom
Conclusion

- Internet freedom orgs can draw ethical lessons from human rights orgs
- Places to start:
  - *Journal of Ethics and International Affairs*
  - *Ethical Questions and International NGOs*
  - www.spherehandbook.org