

Governments, Gatekeepers, and Journalists: What's Next in the Struggle for Internet Governance

April 24, 2013

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In observation of World Press Freedom Day 2013, CIMA hosted the event “Governments, Gatekeepers, and Journalists: What’s Next in the Struggle for Internet Governance” at the National Press Club On April 24. The discussion featured Laura DeNardis of American University, Ross LaJeunesse of Google, Katherine Maher of Access

Now, Christopher Painter of the U.S. Department of State, and Carolina Rossini of Group for Public Policies on Access to Information. Carl Gershman of NED and Angela Greiling Keane of the National Press Club introduced the event, and Marguerite Sullivan of CIMA moderated the discussion.

DeNardis defined Internet governance as the design and administration of the technology and policies necessary to keep the Internet operational. She explained that the Internet is currently governed through a multi-stakeholder system, comprising of the private sector, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society. She emphasized that the multi-stakeholder system is needed to preserve a free and open Internet and that Internet governance has profound social implications for civil liberties, national security, and innovation.

Painter said that Internet freedom and the multi-stakeholder system are intertwined and are both core values at the U.S. Department of State. He said that, although most governments see the promise of the Internet, some are being consumed by the issue of stability. Painter said that the U.S. government must make the case that the free flow of information is an engine for economic growth. He called for capacity building initiatives that address not only cyber security but also free expression.

LaJeunesse discussed how Internet governance and Internet freedom are interlinked. He asserted that the multi-stakeholder system not only works but that it has been the most influential factor in the development of the Internet. LaJeunesse said that the private sector should become more engaged in discussions about Internet governance and Internet freedom for four reasons: economic development, social understanding, user demand, and business growth. He argued that the United Nation’s International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the greatest threat to a free and open Internet, as it is serving as a platform for countries like China, Iran, and Syria that would like to control it.



Ross LaJeunesse, Google

Rossini said that civil society plays a crucial role in keeping the Internet free and open. She offered the Internet Bill of Rights in Brazil as an example. She also pointed out that various policies, ranging from election laws to trade agreements, affect Internet governance and free expression. However, Rossini noted that the debates surrounding Internet governance have been, at times, too technical for civil society to understand how it may affect its day-to-day operations.



Katherine Maher, Access

Maier pointed out that activists' perspectives are diverse and underrepresented in discussions about Internet governance. She said activists are concerned about an unequal balance of power in the multi-stakeholder system and levels of global north-south participation. Maier argued that, despite legitimate criticism, forums like the ITU may be the only way for smaller countries to have their voices heard and participate on a level playing field. She concluded the panel by emphasizing that the issue of access remains critical when looking at the challenges facing developing countries.

Following remarks from the panelists, the audience asked thought-provoking questions ranging from the prospect of change for authoritarian regimes to how to protect human rights online. A full video recording of the event can be found [here](#).

The Center for International Media Assistance is an initiative of the National Endowment for Democracy that works to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance. For more information on CIMA, please visit <http://cima.ned.org>.