

**Committee:** Asia-Pacific Committee

**Issue:** The question of censorship in media and free speech

**Student Officer:** Justin Kim

**Position:** Deputy President of the Asia-Pacific Committee

## Introduction

Language and rhetoric has been a tool for people to express, elaborate, and describe things. The development of language has allowed humans to develop intellectually and express sophisticated and complex ideas easily and has served as a communication tool since the beginning of mankind. While language has branched in different forms (eg. formal and informal), many organizations, communities, and nations have brought up the idea of censorship. The history of censorship is known to begin from 443 BC Rome, where the ideal of good governance was believed to be shaped from the people. Likewise, censorship initially possessed a positive connotation in protecting people from dangerous or provoking material. However, in modern days, the connotation has distorted quite much. Censorship has



**Caption #1: Censorship and Capacity of Expression**

now changed into the connotation of preventing access to specific knowledge in the name of national security, where the citizens are shut down from attaining specific knowledge and are forced to know only what the nation chooses. The question of such censorship includes the free speech of citizens. Many nations limit people's selection of words and only expect them to speak in a certain way, limiting their expressions. The problematic situation of shutting down the freedom of speech for people is the gradual decrease of creativity and ideas, as they cannot be expressed nor recognized in words.

Matters of censorship and restricting the freedom of speech have been continuously condemned by the United Nations. The United Nations recently has set a resolution that defines the restricted use of internet as a violation of human rights. As such, the United Nations shows a strong position of protecting

the rights of information access and freedom of expression. The internet, however, serves as a highly complicated question to address, as it is a widely used medium of communication and information transfer, continually bringing up the question of who should take control and how regulations should be set. Although it is theoretically impossible to set a unified regulation and control over the internet through censorship, a balance between control and freedom should be set.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Censorship

Censorship is defined as the prohibition of any parts of media and literature (eg. books, newspapers, films, etc.) that are considered to be politically unacceptable and threatens to national security.

### Freedom of Speech

Freedom of Speech is a component of human rights that assures people to express their opinions without suppression and censorship.

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a representative document of the United Nations, in which serves as a guideline for member nations to secure basic human rights.

### United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

UNHRC is a intergovernmental council in the United Nations that promote and protect human rights around the world.

### United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO is a branch organization from the United Nations who encourage international peace and the protection of human rights in member nations. The UNESCO has launched many projects and events to spread awareness of this issue.

### Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

The Inter-Parliamentary Union works with parliaments around the world to safeguard peace and bring positive democratic change to the politics of various nations.

### Democracy

Democracy is a political system where citizens are the people who control the country and supports equal rights and voting procedures. The democratic system most likely supports the abolishment of censorship, however every country has a certain extent of censorship - nations all feel the need of censorship for an extent to manage social and political stability.

## **Communism**

Communism is another political system widely utilized, where a single political party takes control of the regime and prohibits private ownership of property. The communist system highly relies on the political stability of the specific political party. For assurance of this, the government most likely chooses to implement censorship in order to take control of society and limit the power of an individual.

## **Background Information**

Since the introduction of the idea of censorship in 443 BC, many nations have advocated the need for censorship. As a result, countries such as China and the Soviet Union have practiced censorship, and are the representative examples for 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century censorship. The freedom of speech was also a challenge historically especially in the religious communities in Europe. Christian Powers in Europe were challenged under the books and documents that contained subversive and heretical information. Since then, censorship became more rigid and was called upon widely. In the modern history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, censorship remained violent. In the era of World War II and Nazi Germany, the Nazis utilized censorship to wipe out people's minds and brutally punished Jewish writers to control the media. While many European and Asian nations utilized censorship as national law, the United States of America took a different stance. On December 15, 1791, the United States Supreme Court passed the First Amendment of the Constitution, which abridges the freedom of speech, press, religion, and assembly. Acknowledging the rights of the citizens, the United States has by far shown the most liberal stance in matters of censorship and the freedom of speech. Americans are accessed to the information provided by the press and can express opinions freely. However, the United States also experiences some controversy in their current administration, with the discrimination of specific press. This shows danger to the fairness and freedom of press. Likewise, there is no nation that practices perfect freedom of speech and anti-censorship. The United Nations continue to find a way to expand the freedom of speech in the world. However, the dilemma of the extent to how much censorship should be implemented still remains as a major question.

## **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

As mentioned in the definition, the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee crafted the Resolution 217A that is now a paramount document of the United Nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights not only addresses on how the United Nations sets their viewpoint on human rights, but sets the guideline on how member states should address basic human rights.

### **Article 19**

The article addresses that everyone has the right of freedom of opinion and expression, where they will not be interfered by oppressive reasons. The full article reads: *“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.”*

### **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**

The ICCPR represents the constitution on protecting civil and political rights for people and monitored by the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Within the document, freedom of speech and censorship are heavily written for the equality in human rights.

### **Article 19**

Similar to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 19<sup>th</sup> article of the ICCPR addresses that everyone has the right of freedom of opinion and expression, where they will not be interfered by oppressive reasons. The full article reads:

1. *Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.*
2. *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.*
3. *The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:*
  - (a) *For respect of the rights or reputations of others;*
  - (b) *For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.*

### **Republic of Singapore**

The Republic of Singapore, despite its widely known free economy and trade policies, has a law that censors films made as a “party political film”. Section 33 of the Singapore Films Act reads:

*Making, distribution and exhibition of party political films*

33. Any person who —

(a) imports any party political film;

(b) makes or reproduces any party political film;

(c) distributes, or has in his possession for the purposes of distributing, to any other person any party political film; or

(d) exhibits, or has in his possession for the purposes of exhibiting, to any other person any party political film,

*knowing or having reasonable cause to believe the film to be a party political film shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$100,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years.*

## United States of America

The United States of America is known for its Constitutional protection on the right of free speech. The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America addresses the protection against censorship and assures the freedom of speech of every citizen. However, through many Supreme Court cases in the nation’s history, the extent to the free selection of words is quite vague and is the reason that puts the nation 41st in the Press Freedom Index. The First Amendment of the Constitution reads:

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1766	Sweden becomes the first country to publish law against censorship
December 10 1948	General Assembly Resolution 217A (Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

December 16 1966	General Assembly Resolution 2200A (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)
June 27 2016	UNHRC Resolution A/HRC/32/L.20 that condemns the disruption of internet access is passed
July 1 2016	UNHCR agrees to affirm an expanded resolution on online censorship rights

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations has continued to craft resolutions related to the protection of the freedom of speech and decreasing censorship for the rights of people. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as an important viewpoint of the United Nations' goal. Also, the United Nations showed continuous commitment towards this issue by adding the censorship and freedom of speech issue in the post-2015 Development Goals of the United Nations. In effort towards this issue, the United Nations Human Rights Council has been reporting on the status of media freedom in member states. Also, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has been reporting on the legislative and constitutional guarantees in providing internet access and information usages.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights General Assembly Resolution 217A
- International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights General Assembly Resolution 2200A
- UNHRC Resolution on condemning internet disruption from countries A/HRC/32/L.20

## Bibliography

*The Long History of Censorship*, [www.beaconforfreedom.org/liste.html?tid=415&art\\_id=475](http://www.beaconforfreedom.org/liste.html?tid=415&art_id=475).

“Tim Bass.” *Cyberspace Situational Awareness*, 3 Aug. 2016,  
[www.thecepblog.com/2016/08/03/censorship-is-not-cybersecurity-2/](http://www.thecepblog.com/2016/08/03/censorship-is-not-cybersecurity-2/).

“Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, United Nations,  
[www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/](http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/).

Vincent, James. “UN Condemns Internet Access Disruption as a Human Rights Violation.” *The Verge*, The Verge, 4 July 2016,  
[www.theverge.com/2016/7/4/12092740/un-resolution-condemns-disrupting-internet-access](http://www.theverge.com/2016/7/4/12092740/un-resolution-condemns-disrupting-internet-access).

“Information Platformhumanrights.ch.” *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - Humanrights.ch*, [www.humanrights.ch/en/standards/un-treaties/iccpr/](http://www.humanrights.ch/en/standards/un-treaties/iccpr/).