

Ögmundur Jónasson  
Innanríkisráðuneytið  
Sölvhólsgötu  
Reykjavík

Re: Open Letter to Ögmundur Jónasson, Icelandic Minister of Interior, regarding Internet censorship

Dear Mr. Jónasson,

As security, privacy and human rights advocates and organizations from around the world, we are writing to express our deep concern with your current proposals to attempt to restrict Internet access in Iceland to pornographic content.

Iceland is a liberal democratic state which should not serve as a role model for Internet censorship. Regimes, totalitarian and democratic alike, can use these proposals as an example in order to justify censorship of the Internet, practiced or proposed. It has already jeopardized longstanding efforts to prevent or abolish censorship in totalitarian regimes and protect civil liberties and human rights worldwide.

The current discussion of blocking pornographic content has offered no definition, no evidence, and suggested no technology. This is an affront to basic principles of the society, and while we acknowledge that this discussion is at a starting point, we feel that the way it is being conducted is harmful.

Traditionally, censorship has involved preventing publication and persecution of people with unpopular opinions. On the Internet, censorship has taken a new guise. It doesn't merely prevent publication, but also restricts people's access to the information they seek. Rather than silencing a voice, the result is depriving the population of material they can see and read. This is censorship, as it skews the way people see the world. It is tempting to regard filtering the internet as a quick and easy way to restrict unwanted speech, opinions, or media, which the government regards as harmful for either them or the people. The right to see the world as it is, is critical to the very tenets and functions of a democracy and must be protected at all costs.

It is technically impossible to censor content delivered over the Internet without monitoring all telecommunications. Not just unwanted communications or inappropriate material, everything must be examined automatically by unsupervised machines which make the final decision on whether to allow the content to continue or not. This level of government surveillance directly conflicts with the idea of a free society.

Internet censorship is used by totalitarian regimes in order to restrict people's access to various information and material on the internet. The methods used to conduct this censorship are technically identical to the methods that would be employed by Iceland if these plans were to be implemented. The act of censoring pornography in Iceland differs in no way from repression of speech in Iran, China or North Korea. By stating that Iceland is considering censoring pornographic material on the Internet for moral reasons, they are justifying rather than condemning the actions of totalitarian regimes.

The internet is not the source of violence, it is merely a medium by which violence is made apparent. If the government of Iceland is genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of victims of violence, there are many more effective ways. The prohibition of pornographic content may create demand for an underground porn industry, unregulated and most certainly affiliated with other illegal activities, as we

have seen in the case of drugs or alcohol prohibition. Hiding the problem is not a solution and may in fact make things worse.

If the Icelandic Government worries about children getting their sexual education from pornography on the Internet, the solution should be better sex education in the home or through schools. Sex education that deals not only with conception, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases, but also relationships, communication and respect.

There exist decentralized technical measures that respect the rights and dignity of all citizens in a society which involves aiding families with providing an accessible way to make their own computer and internet access secure for their children, but technically speaking, it would still be possible to go around the blockage.

Over the last years, Iceland has been regarded by the international community as a shining example of a free, democratic society. Iceland has positioned itself as a model democratic state in global context when dealing with freedom of the press, the open process of drafting a new constitution, and open review of information regulation. Therefore, we implore you to reject censorship as a viable option and seek more effective means of improving society, both in Iceland and abroad.

Kind regards,

Renata Avila Pinto, Human Rights Lawyer (Guatemala)  
Jillian C. York, Director for International Freedom of Expression, Electronic Frontier Foundation (USA)  
Kim Pham, Principal, Expression Tech (USA)  
Sjón, Author, President of Icelandic PEN (Iceland)  
Ethan Zuckerman, director of the Center for Civic Media at MIT (USA)  
Richard Stallman, President, Free Software Foundation (USA)  
Mina Naguib, Human rights activist (Egypt)  
Katarzyna Szymielewicz, Panoptykon Foundation (Poland)  
Trevor Timm, Freedom of the Press Foundation (USA)  
Michał "rysiak" Woźniak, President, Fundacja Wolnego i Otwartego Oprogramowania (Poland)  
Ásta Guðrún Helgadóttir, Free speech activist (Iceland)  
Stefan Marsiske, Hungarian Autonomous Center for Knowledge (Hungary)  
Beatriz Busaniche, Vía Libre Foundation (Argentina)  
Walter van Holst, Vrijschrift (Netherlands)  
Atanas Tchobanov, Balkanleaks (Bulgaria)  
Mazen Maarouf, Writer (Palestine)  
Aðalheiður Ámundadóttir, Lawyer (Iceland)  
Douwe Korff, Foundation for Information Policy Research (United Kingdom)  
Arjen Kamphuis, Chairman, Open Source Working Group, Internet Society (Netherlands)  
James Vasile, Director, New America Foundation Open Internet Tools Project (USA)  
Timo Karjalainen, President, Electronic Frontier Finland (Finland)  
Ot van Daalen, Director, Bits of Freedom (Netherlands)  
Aleksander Waszkielewicz, President of the Board, Fundacja Instytut Rozwoju Regionalnego (Poland)  
Guðjón Már Guðjónsson, Internet Policy Institute (Iceland)  
Margot Kaminski, Executive Director of the Information Society Project at Yale Law School (USA)  
Smári McCarthy, Executive Director, International Modern Media Institute (Iceland)  
Laurie Penny, author and journalist (United Kingdom)  
Sunil Abraham, Executive Director Center for Internet and Society (India)  
Thomas Hughes, Managing Director, Media Frontiers (Denmark)

Miguel Morachimo, Hiperderecho (Peru)  
Annie Machon, former MI5 intelligence officer and civil liberties campaigner (United Kingdom)  
Daniela Bozhinova, Bulgarian Association for the Promotion of Citizens Initiative (Bulgaria)  
Dariusz Grzesista, Chairman, Polish Linux Users' Group (Poland)  
Mohammed Tarakiyee, Jordan Open Source (Jordan)  
Józef Halbersztadt, Internet Society Poland (Poland)  
Zineb Belmkaddem, Free speech activist (Morocco)  
Rafik Dammak, Free speech activist (Tunisia)  
Oktavía Jónsdóttir, Executive Director, Human Link Network (Denmark)  
Josef Irnberger, Initiative für Netzfreiheit (Germany)  
Markus Beckedahl, Digitale Geschellschaft (Germany)  
Alek Tarkowski, Director, Centrum Cyfrowe Projekt: Polska (Poland)  
Hugleikur Dagsson, Artist (Iceland)