Social, Cultural, & Humanitarian Committee

SOCHUM

AGENDA:

Protecting the Freedom of Expression in the Digital Era: Government Censorship and Platform Regulation

SOCHUM

STUDY GUIDE

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LETTER FROM THE BUREAU

Greetings delegates,

The bureau is overjoyed to welcome you to the 10th iteration of the Shishukunj MUN. The aim is to make this committee a perfect blend of formal discussions and fiery debates, of immense knowledge and lighthearted jokes, of strong leadership and heartfelt connections. The study guide has been provided as an essential resource, however, it's not the sole resource to be used. Instead, it should serve as the base for your own research, original ideas and solutions. The study guide is meant for the understanding of the agenda, but delegates are expected to research well beyond that.

The agenda statement we've decided "**Protecting the Freedom of Expression in the Digital Era: Government Censorship and Platform Regulation**" is exciting and quite relevant globally. It is a topic that can be very well understood by each one of you, but only after required research and critical thinking. It touches upon the global issue of government censorship and freedom of expression, and their inability to coexist in harmony in various nations. We expect viable and original solutions that can truly be applied in the current scenario.

Your research must align with your assigned agenda and be reflected clearly in your portfolio. Most importantly, plagiarism will not be tolerated—all written submissions and speeches must reflect your original thought, supported by properly cited research. Seeing each one of the delegates unleash their potential is a much awaited event.

Thank You,
Anay Mehta, Chairperson
Labdhi Jain, Vice Chairperson
Pinakini Karnik, Rapporteur

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly and is dedicated to discussing issues of promotion of human rights, protection of basic freedoms, and promotion of social and humanitarian causes globally. SOCHUM is amongst the big six UNGA committees and is a platform for member states to discuss human rights violations globally, social injustices, and violations of human dignity. Although its recommendations are not legally binding, they have de facto moral and diplomatic influence. Rewrite this sentence The activities of SOCHUM are extensive, cultural cooperation promotes peace.

What makes SOCHUM unique is that it introduces humanitarian values into the otherwise politicized arena of international diplomacy. It demands the use of the moral vision of policy-making without undermining the strategic negotiations and the consensus-building mechanism.

The agenda—**"Protecting Freedom of Speech in the Digital Age: Addressing Government Censorship and Platform Regulation"**—is well-placed in SOCHUM because it focuses on the very nature of the human right of freedom of expression. With digital platforms now at the center of communication and public discourse, the line between state control, private regulation, and individual rights has been blurred. SOCHUM is the perfect platform for this debate to occur because it places human dignity and fundamental freedoms at the forefront. The committee allows delegates not just to discuss the legal and political dimensions of digital speech, but also the social, ethical, and humanitarian implications of censorship and regulation in the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

The Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee under the agenda "**Protecting the Freedom of Expression in the Digital Era: Government Censorship and Platform Regulation**" seeks to explore various aspects of censorship and freedom of expression focusing on how they can be made to coexist in the digital era with social media being the most widespread medium for societal dialogue and discussion as well as the propagation of information.

We'll work to resolve how citizens can have freedom of expression as their integral human right within the international law while preventing the misuse of this right on the internet.

Overall, the agenda offers three aspects of discussion: Protecting freedom of expression in the online space as an umbrella to two of its other aspects, how digital platforms regulate and filter the content present, and how governments of countries suppress or silence the voice of their people online. These two aspects are the major threats to the freedom of expression in today's time.

Analysing the process of platform regulation will also allow us to observe how social media platforms can effectively play a part in removing illegal, factually inaccurate or inappropriate content by filtering and regulating the digital environment while keeping the freedom of expression intact. The overall impact of unregulated platforms will also be discussed. Understanding how censorship has evolved and changed with the digital era and how various social media platforms operate is pivotal to understanding the agenda deeply.

Having understood the essence of censorship under regular situations, let's understand how censorship differs during a crisis. When a country is facing a crisis or a crisis-like situation for example protests and forms of civil unrest, international conflicts or a pandemic, certain content on the internet is removed by the government so as to not propagate misinformation or hatred that could worsen the situation. However; at times the stringent censorship during these times is used by the government to take down public criticism from the internet, posing a threat to the freedom of expression of its people.

In a nutshell, the committee will engage in fruitful discussions on the various issues regarding social media platforms, their regulation, private platforms, press freedom in the digital world, government censorship and how it differs during a crisis, defining the parameters of censorship, setting global standards in the context of the agenda.

PAST RESOLUTIONS

UN Document A/71/373 (2016): Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression-

1. Governing the Platform and Private Actors

The study emphasises how web pages (such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) have become main platforms for public conversation. Though these sites aren't subject to human rights law as states are, their rules tend to influence worldwide standards for expression. Transparency of content moderation, arbitrary deletions, and disproportionate enforcement of policies were cited as a significant threat.

Recommendation: Platforms should adopt increased levels of transparency, human rights-based models, and self-monitoring systems.

2. Censorship and Government Control

The report examines how governments increasingly push tech firms to censor content, particularly content that is critical of the state or voices of dissent. These include requests for data to be erased, geoblocking, and increased state surveillance through legislation.

These practices skirt due process, are unaccountable, and avoid Article 19 of the ICCPR.

3. Internet Shutdowns

The Special Rapporteur unequivocally denounced the practice of internet shutdowns, which he termed "measures that have the near certainty of failing to meet the test of necessity and proportionality.".

They usually occur during elections, demonstrations, or civil disturbances and are used to silence opposition instead of defending national security. The report deems them an infringement of the right to information and expression.

4. Recommendations

Governments should not cut off the internet and should legalize any restrictions, making them necessary, and proportionate. Private firms should:

Be more open in their approach to handling content.

Post regular transparency reports.

Provide users a way to contest content removal. International human rights law needs to be pulled into alignment to take into account the pivotal position of private actors as speech moderators in the online public sphere.
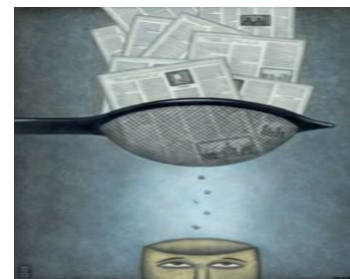
KEY TERMS

1. **Arbitrary:** based on a desire or idea or chance rather than a reason.

2. **Freedom of Expression:** the right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

3. **Censorship:** restrictions imposed on the propagation of information, ideas or any content or on public communication through any given medium, usually carried out by a figure of authority.

4. **Dissent:** disagreement or difference in opinion, sometimes depicting disapproval with the given opinion or idea.

5. **Algorithmic Bias :** Systematic errors or favouritism in algorithmic decision-making, often unintentionally reinforcing discrimination or silencing certain voices online.

6. **Internet Shutdown:** The deliberate disruption or complete blocking of internet access, often by governments, during protests, civil unrest, or emergencies.

7. **Cyber Sovereignty:** The idea that each nation-state should have full control over its internet infrastructure, policies, and online content regulation within its borders.

8. **Watchdog Bodies**: Independent regulatory or oversight organisations responsible for monitoring digital censorship, platform behaviour, or government restrictions on free speech

9. **Deep Fakes:** Digitally altered videos or audio recordings created using artificial intelligence to imitate real people, often used to spread false information or impersonate individuals.

10. **Echo Chambers**: Online spaces where users are primarily exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, limiting exposure to differing viewpoints and reducing critical thinking.

INFRINGEMENT OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The freedom to express oneself is a globally recognised necessity, and most countries give freedom of speech as a fundamental right, but citizens only have freedom of speech as long as they don't cross certain lines or else their voice is muted; this is also called censorship. While in some cases censorship is used for national security and to prevent unrest, governments have often been observed to use censorship to censor criticism against their policies. In many countries, it is also seen that news channels and media rarely criticise the ruling party, and even their faults are covered, while every move of the opposition is under a microscope. Social media platforms intentionally or unintentionally have also been seen to mould public opinion and control who can or cannot speak on their platform without much explanation.

Content Restriction

Governments of various countries often censor "sensitive" content, but as to what "sensitive" means is not exactly known. While sometimes it is used to prevent situations of unrest or to protect national security, censorship is also used by governments to "protect" underprivileged communities. Now, what this means is that not only the hate speech regarding this community but the voice of the community itself is often silenced. Lack of proper specifications has also led governments to censor articles and reports criticising their policies, and voices of the people criticising the government rarely find the spotlight. This poses a great risk to the people's right to speech as the people's right to speech is being suppressed and their opinions are being shaped, and most of them are not aware of this. Governments have intentionally left the definition of sensitive content vague to cover up criticism and dissent as dangerous content. What this does is that even though feelings of discontent among the public exist, these feelings don't reach many people and are not widely discussed, so people remain unaware of other people's problems.

Journalism and Press Freedom

Journalism is the cornerstone of democracy, as journalists' information is spread through society which allows people to make informed decisions and hold those in power accountable. Journalists don't just spread information to the people, but also make it possible for people's concerns to be heard by others and for these concerns to be discussed in the spotlight. So, the journalists and the press serve one of the most important functions in any democracy- to ensure that people remain informed and that the people's voice never goes unheard. In recent times, censorship and attacks on journalists

have affected the work of journalists, leading to people getting selected and filtered news. The press is an important source of information, and with the frequent flow of misinformation on the internet print media is a place where readers can put their trust. Censorship of print media has led to articles about criticism and dissent of government officials and their policies not being printed, and as a result the public remains unaware of the scrutiny of government policies. Articles of people's discontent towards the government also don't get printed. This doesn't stop at censorship but goes on to attacks on journalists in many countries like China, Russia and Vietnam even reporting journalist deaths. This violates Articles 17 and 19 of the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)as these are attacks on the journalists honour and reputation and also violates their freedom of speech. To ensure that democracies remain functioning properly and the public is well informed about the happenings in their country, the current state of affairs needs to change.

Role of Big Tech in Silencing Speech

Social media has become a major medium for the spread of information and for people to express themselves. In recent times, it has been observed that social platforms have knowingly or unknowingly amplified the voice of some users and silenced the voice of others. Social media platforms can ban or censor the posts of any user without the legal obligation to properly justify it. This has created a digital space in which the spread of content and voice of the people is in the hands of these organisations, which has led to certain topics getting less reach than others and certain topics even being silenced. With the increasing use of social media and the fact that it has become a source of information for many, controlling and restricting the flow of speech on these platforms may have serious consequences. The Human Rights Watch documented Meta taking down 1,049 peaceful posts in support of Palestine by Palestinians and their supporters from about 60 countries. This is just one incident where censorship was used without any valid argument. so even when they do violate guidelines or people's right to speech they are not held accountable for it. Rephrase this sentence

Parameters of Censorship

National Security
Protecting national security is one of the most common justification given for censorship, especially in times of conflict, crisis, or political unrest. Restrictions are put over the content that possess the risk to threaten public safety for example leaking of military operations or spreading misinformation that may lead to panic and unrest. However the power of restricting content must be exercised cautiously as the line between protection and suppression can be dangerously thin.

Protection of Minors

One more prevailing reason cited for digital content control is the protection of minors from potentially harmful or inappropriate content. This includes filtering out websites filled with hate speeches, depictions of extreme violence, torture, promotion or glorification of drug use, discontent, self-harm, suicide promotion etc. People may consider that censorship is necessary to safeguard children's innocence and protect them from harm but the debate surrounding censorship needs to be balanced out by involving the right to freedom of expression while protecting minors. In conclusion, while it is crucial to shield minors from harmful digital content, this must be balanced with the right to freedom of expression.

Defining boundaries

Sometimes, censorship is important—especially when it comes to protecting national security, public order, and vulnerable groups. However, using it must be done under certain limits and boundaries to ensure that the government does not violate freedom of speech. To ensure that there is a balance between censorship (for good) and freedom of speech, one needs to ensure that the reason for censorship is well defined and appropriate according to the circumstances.Delegates are expected to understand this issue and suggest legal boundaries in order to ensure that the right to freedom of expression is never compromised by any censorship rules. In conclusion, censorship without boundaries can be really dangerous. Just like healthy boundaries in relationships foster trust and well-being, clear boundaries in censorship help uphold liberty while protecting society and its rights.

Preventing harmful content

Censorship can play a vital role in preventing the spread of harmful content such as hate speech, incitement to violence, terrorist propaganda, and misinformation that can lead to public panic or endanger lives. Especially in the digital age, where content can go viral in minutes, a proactive approach is necessary to limit messages that might encourage discrimination, violence, or societal unrest. It is important to do this especially in the times when the country is going through unrest, as false information or hate speech can lead to a huge crisis. However this should be done while maintaining a balance so that the right to expression is not violated and the power is not misused.

Censorship during Critical Times

Censorship and Freedom of Expression
Censorship is often an inevitable aspect to allowing free speech to ensure that it doesn't put anyone at a disadvantage. Censorship is used to ensure that any content, written or visual, factual or fictional is appropriate for being expressed in the public sphere. If this is not ensured, the content may be factually inaccurate and spread misinformation, violent or

hateful thoughts and ideas or may be inappropriate. However, its use cannot be justified under such a criteria at all times. Often, governments use censorship to silence public criticism and the spread of information that doesn't work in their favour. That is when it takes the shape of a pressing issue, when it threatens the fundamental right to freedom of expression.

What counts as a critical time or a crisis?

When a state faces a disruption in its natural order, owing to an issue that generates an environment of panic among its citizens, on a nationwide scale, for instance a war with another country, an internal conflict, protests, a pandemic; its censorship laws tend to change.

How does censorship differ during a crisis?

During a crisis censorship tends to be more stringent, in order to ensure that the flow of information, voices and public opinion is done responsibly to prevent it from worsening the situation. To prevent the flow of medical misinformation during a pandemic or to prevent a breach in national security when the country is at war, different forms of censorship are imposed.

Forms of Censorship that a Government may impose during a crisis

Depending on the intensity and requirement of the situation, various methods are used to censor speech. We'll mainly be focusing on the digital aspects, being:-
i) Internet Shutdown: Blocking or partially interrupting internet service, when forms of targeted censorship don't suffice.
ii) Media Blackout: Restricting access to or shutting down some media platforms, such as social media or news websites.
Delegates are expected to deliberate upon the impacts of internet shutdowns and media blackouts, mainly about how and when they impact freedom of expressio**n.**

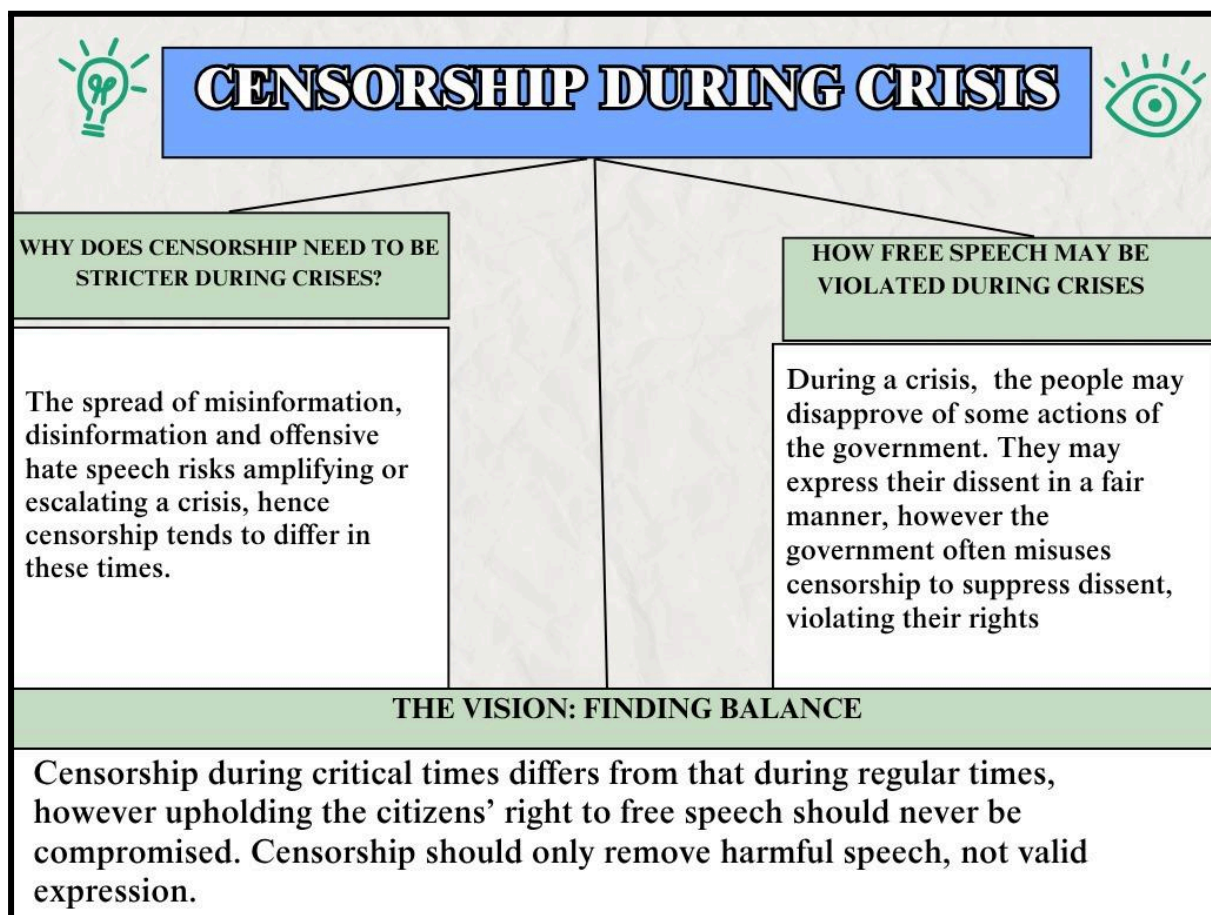### How international human rights principles are violated during crises?

Freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 19 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Overall; they both state that "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 of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of choice."
During crises or a crisis-like scenario; these international human rights principles are often overlooked, and freedom of expression faces unjustifiable limitations used to suppress public scrutiny and mute their voice.

Preventing and Countering Violations:

To conclude, we will be discussing how violations of freedom of expression undertaken during a crisis can be prevented in the first place, and countered if not prevented, exploring

all the possible routes that may help us curb the issue of unjust and extensive restrictions imposed on free speech and flow of information on the internet during times of crisis.

Platform Regulation

In recent times when the use of social media has increased and it has become a space for people to make their voice heard, the debate of whether or not these platforms should be regulated has become one of the most important discussions of the current time. The fact is that even if these platforms are not regulated by the government, they are still controlled by private companies so they are not really spaces of free speech but are controlled atmospheres.

Removal of Sensitive Content

The major cause for the regulation of digital platforms is the removal and censoring of sensitive content, but it is often seen that when fake content or sensitive content spreads, these social media platforms are often very late in responding and the damage is already done so in a way censorship of sensitive content has become a tool for social media platforms to silence people and influence speech but is not serving its actual purpose. Germany is a country that has very strict rules when it comes to taking down illegal content after a complaint regarding the same has been made. A major challenge when censoring or suspending sensitive content is that in cases when hate speech or misinformation regarding a community or a tragedy is done, it often results in the voice of that community and the

reports regarding the tragedy also being censored. Delegates need to research more on laws regarding illegal and sensitive content takedowns and come up with solutions that allow censoring sensitive content, but don't let the voice of the people be suppressed.

Prioritise High Risk Areas

The major need for regulation is in high-risk areas, but they are where most platforms are lagging in reacting early and controlling the situation before the damage is done. If these high-risk areas were to be properly monitored, the need for monitoring the entire digital space would reduce. High-risk areas such as child abuse, medical misinformation, which can impact society adversely need to be regulated with the utmost priority. A large part of the users of these media platforms are teenagers who tend to believe almost everything that they hear and see on these platforms, so if illegal content is circulating on these platforms it is also being consumed by teenagers and this could have serious repercussions

Clear Community Guidelines

The guidelines of these companies are written in complex language which makes it which makes it difficult for the users to understand, though the official documents have to be written in a complex form the guidelines should be available to the users in a simple form which ensure that the users properly understand the guidelines and remain informed about the companies guidelines. Companies often ban their users because of violation of guidelines but it has been seen that sometimes users are banned without even actually violating the community guidelines. If the users were to understand the community guidelines properly, they could question and challenge this decision of the company.

Societal impact of unregulated platforms

Spread of Misinformation and Hate Speech

Social media has become an important mode for the public to communicate and obtain relevant information with unlimited access. However, due to the lack of online supervision and user anonymity, it has become difficult to draw a line between misinformation and true information, which often makes the public face the risk of being misled while finding real information. The spread of misinformation and hate speech poses a significant threat to societies, undermining trust, introducing conflict, and potentially leading to violence and discrimination. Disinformation sometimes focuses on particular groups in society, such as migrants, or certain ethnic groups and is designed to incite violence, discrimination or hostility.

Hate speech often relates to a particular individual who might be a political or public figure or a journalist, inaccurate information about health care and disease prevention, such as false information on risks associated with vaccines, deters people from making healthcare

decisions that protect their health, putting them and others at greater risk. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, health-based misinformation increased, vaccine hesitancy and negatively impacted public health in nearly every country worldwide. While misinformation and hate speech are causing a lot of trouble to the individuals and the society addressing them has to be done carefully so as to ensure that the freedom of speech and expression is not compromised

The delegates are expected to find solutions offering a balanced approach which protects individuals' right to freedom of expression without suppressing their opinions about the world.

Formation of 'Echo Chambers' and it effects on society

Echo chambers form when individuals are primarily exposed to information and opinions that reinforce their existing beliefs, creating a closed system where opposing views are minimized. For example, a person loves watching gaming videos and every time he opens his phone to watch something, his phone is full of notifications about new gaming videos and stuff he likes. But have you ever wondered of this happening? Ever asked yourself how does the software know how to show you the content you crave for? The answer lies in the formation of Echochambers. Echo chambers are created online through algorithms that first recognize the interests and search patterns of the user by taking into consideration the watch time, liked videos, most shared, search history etc, it then carefully prioritizes to show the user the content they have previously engaged with.

But what is the problem in this if it is making the user have a satisfactory experience?

Well the problem starts when users are consistently exposed to information that aligns with their existing views, it can reinforce those beliefs and make them less receptive to alternative perspectives. This can lead to a narrowing of their understanding of complex issues and a greater tendency to dismiss opposing viewpoints. Echo chambers limit exposure to diverse perspectives, making it harder for individuals to develop an unbiased understanding of complex issues. The constant reinforcement of pre-existing beliefs can hinder critical thinking making it more difficult to solve problems collaboratively and develop effective solutions to societal challenges.

Improved Detection of Deepfakes and Misinformation :

Ever heard of AI generated news, Deepfakes can be used to create convincing fake videos or images that can spread misinformation, potentially inciting violence, swaying public opinion, or damaging reputations. For example, A fake and heavily manipulated video depicting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy circulated on social media and was placed on a Ukrainian news website by hackers in March 2022. The video showed a rendering of the Ukrainian president appearing to tell his soldiers to lay down their arms and surrender the

fight against Russia which tried to demoralize Ukrainian forces and mislead the public during the most crucial time. Together as delegates of the respective countries it is our duty to ensure that the harm of deep fakes and the havoc they create is managed and detected in an unbiased and clear way.

But clearly the question still remains that how do we know of - **What is "true" and what is "false"?** It is a tough question to answer because in ideal world the truth is based on verifications, facts and evidences but in reality people have different opinions and mindsets about different things and incidents which is why a lot of them tend to believe in their own little world of thoughts and become unacceptable to other opinions even if they are true. Society can not jump to the conclusion of right and wrong if we keep on hindering our critical thinking by remaining in our cosy little echochamber social media has created as an unwanted gift for us.

The Role of Courts and Other Institutions

Courts and independent institutions play a vital role in maintaining and safeguarding that thin delicate line between censorship and freedom of expression. They act as guardians of constitutional rights, ensuring that any restrictions placed on speech are legal, well explained and requested, time bound and have good intentions. It is important that during the times of crisis the courts and institutions interfere and observe the censorship

TACKLING THE ISSUE THROUGH GLOBAL STANDARDS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

International Human Rights Principles

This sub-part is based on internationally recognised legal frameworks in which freedom of expression is dedicated as a human right, their shortcomings that are relevant to the agenda at hand, and the scope for improvement in the current global standards. Existing frameworks on human rights, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) do recognise freedom of expression as a human right. These documents however, were created before the internet and social media rose as prominent platforms. Hence, they do not address the digital aspect of freedom of expression specifically. At present, however, the internet has a major role in shaping public opinion and circulating information in society. As the mode of people's expression has changed with time, new issues regarding their freedom of expression have also emerged. This creates room for further articulation and deliberation on freedom of expression in the digital era.

Ensuring a secure digital environment for users

On one hand, the internet has broadened the reach and exercise of free expression, on the other, it has certainly come with its own risks. The internet has users all across the globe, and as it has become an indispensable tool for these users, the risks faced by the users have also become unavoidable.

Digital platforms can be used as a medium for spreading hate speech, targeting communities or individuals. Online harassment, cyberbullying, and threats that incite violence can have a negative impact on the victim. Such forms of abuse can create a hostile online environment, making it difficult for individuals to express themselves freely. A secure environment is essential for encompassing exercise of free speech. This means that if the online world is made to be safe and inclusive for all users, it will allow a much fairer exercise of freedom of expression globally.

The digital environment requires regulation and refining to ensure the users safety, while also allowing the exercise of freedom of expression to occur freely.

CASE STUDY: INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN SYRIA

Introduction

This case study allows us to explore the threats faced by the right to freedom of expression in an era where communication, propagation of information and public voice largely relies on the internet and subsequently, how shutting down the internet completely or partially disrupting access poses a threat to the same.

Since 2011, Syrian authorities have been using a state-controlled internet and telecommunications infrastructure to silence public dissent, disrupt communications, conduct mass surveillance etc. A new cybercrime law, passed more recently in April 2022 has only strengthened this control, criminalizing freedom of expression and restricting the free flow of information under the title of combating cybercrime and misuse of technology. Internet shutdowns in Syria have proven to be intentional and arbitrary in nature, in order to silence public dissent and opposition groups <u>during times of unrest</u>. Research has also shown that internet shutdowns in Syria go hand in hand with state violence. Syrian authorities have intentionally restricted internet access to carry out violence towards citizens more effectively in the absence of a medium to propagate information and objections.

Syria also undertook internet shutdowns on a national level to "prevent cheating" during national exams, and later publicly promised to end exam shutdowns as of academic year 2021-2022; nevertheless continuing the repressive practice. It is also important to note that there is a lack of evidence demonstrating the impact of internet shutdowns on exam cheating. This reveals how internet shutdowns are not merely a form of censorship for Syria, but are being done with no reasonable explanation, as part of their repressive regime.

Ramifications of Internet Shutdowns

By cutting off internet access, the government hinders citizens' ability to communicate with each other, spread information and stay informed via various digital mediums including news and online updates.

These shutdowns also make it difficult for officials, journalists and human rights workers to document human rights abuses, report on the conflict, and share information internationally, limiting their ability to hold the government accountable.

Majorly, the aspect that the committee will be focusing on is the suppression of public voice, the violation of the citizen's right to the freedom of expression, and how the Syrian authorities have altogether violated international human rights law, specifically Article 19 of both, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

EXPECTATIONS FROM DELEGATES

By coming to the end of the guide we expect that now you know it is important to take actions of unregulated censorship and platforms and make sure to uphold the right to freedom of speech and expressions.

We've discussed the challenges—misinformation, deep fakes, censorship, and the ever-complicated battle between truth and the hidden truth. But now, the time has come to do what truly matters: **create change**. Not just any change—but meaningful, impactful, and visionary change..

The delegates are expected to suggest an international treaty that outlines acceptable boundaries of censorship, ensuring protection of journalistic and civil voices which includes the conditions that have been mentioned throughout the guide. The bureau expects the delegates to work on finding solutions on preventing the spread of misinformation and hate speech and detecting deep fakes in an unbiased way. The solutions that the delegates come up with should not only prevent spread of misinformation but should also ensure that the freedom of expression is not taken away from the people.

Delegates need to research not only about the stance of their country but also need to read up on all the subtopics in detail. The committee demands debates, discussions and negotiations so as to ensure that the balance is always maintained. The delegates are expected to form block on the basis of the stances of their delegation and debate upon the moderation and balancing of censorship.

CONCLUSION

This study guide has provided you with a comprehensive overview of the agenda:
"Protecting Freedom of Speech in the Digital Age: Addressing Government Censorship and Platform Regulation."

From the SOCHUM mandate to the intricacies of digital censorship, platform regulation, disinformation, and the social cost of unregulated digital spaces, the guide is designed to leave you well-prepared to grasp the core issues, identify relevant case studies, and contrast state and non-state involvement in determining online freedom of expression. You are also introduced to the core legal frameworks, current resolutions, and key terms for advanced debate and policy writing.

But this handbook is merely a starting point. Delegates are urged to do a great deal of independent research, as well as the one described here. Draw on authoritative sources such as UN reports, international law journals, academic journals, and live news coverage to fill in gaps in your knowledge of your selected country's stance and the nuances of the agenda Anything you write and say must be in your own words supported by properly referenced research. Plagiarism and AI use is strictly prohibited.

When you enter the SOCHUM committee, bring an open mind that allows you to take in others' perspectives and collaborate in order to come up with creative and practical solutions. Your research based responses and empathetic decision making can create constructive solutions to one of the most significant problems in the digital world.

Thank You,
Anay Mehta, Chairperson
Labdhi Jain, Vice Chairperson
Pinakini Karnik, Rapporteur

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER (QARMA)

1) How can the digital aspect of the issue of balancing free speech and censorship be better addressed and integrated in the present landscape of international law?

2) How can censorship during a crisis be carried out while also upholding the principle of freedom of expression to a righteous extent during times of distress and panic?

3) Should social media platforms be obligated to protect their users' free speech?
   3.1) Should they feel responsible to limit or avoid amplifying damaging speech?
   3.2) Is it necessary to have legislation that enforces these obligations?

4) Find effective ways to detect and prevent the spread of deep fakes and misinformation?

5) Which international organizations should be responsible for legally defining the boundaries of censorship and overseeing its enforcement?

6) How can we find a balanced approach that addresses misinformation while protecting the right to free speech?

7) How can media platforms be regulated in a way that no private body or person has complete control over the speech in that digital space.

8) How can transparency of the working of online platforms be increased.

9) How can social media companies be held accountable for their actions that lead to the silencing of a user's speech without proper justification.

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