

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
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Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Subcommittee On Human Rights And The Law,
Hearing On "Global Internet Freedom and the Rule of Law, Part II"
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Today, the Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law holds an important hearing on global Internet freedom. This important legal issue affects human rights around the globe, and it is an issue that I have worked on and championed for many years.

This decade will bring both new opportunities and new challenges for the Internet, and for the fight for human rights around the world. The Internet has become a vital tool to protect and ensure the rights and basic freedoms of Americans and the human rights of people everywhere. In today's Information Age, the Internet is perhaps the most efficient and expeditious means for spreading information about what is happening in the world, and for holding governments accountable.

One of the most pressing challenges posed by the Internet is the censorship of online information. For some time now, we have witnessed the troubling efforts of repressive regimes - such as the governments of China, Iran and North Korea - to censor, or in some cases eliminate, their citizens' access to information via the Internet. Most Americans are by now very familiar with the troubling reports that the government of China has hacked into the private e-mail accounts of human rights activists. We must address these serious challenges to freedom of expression head-on.

The early advances of the Internet originated in the United States, and the world rightly looks to us for leadership on matters of Internet freedom. I am very pleased that, last month, Secretary Clinton boldly reaffirmed our Nation's deep commitment to openness and freedom of expression on the Internet. The Obama administration has taken a decisive and important step.

America must also take the lead in protecting those who simply provide a platform for Internet speech from liability for the content of online speech generated by others. Our Federal laws already do this. And we must work with other nations to find the best way to promote free and open Internet speech around the globe.

Under President Obama's leadership, the United States must -- and will -- lead the way on advancing global Internet freedom. But, so too must American businesses.

Our world-class technology industry must be an integral part of the fight for global Internet freedom. During the last decade, the high tech community has developed many different kinds of anti-censorship tools to overcome firewalls and other censoring technologies. In addition, self described "hacktivists" are also quickly developing new software to allow the citizens of China to circumvent government Internet censorship programs. I applaud these efforts and I hope that

they will continue.

Today's hearing is an important opportunity to build on these successes, and to examine how best to combat Internet censorship and promote human rights in the decade ahead. Again, I thank Senator Durbin for holding this hearing, and I thank all of the witnesses for appearing before the Committee.

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