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"Call to Bloggers" to stand up for freedom ahead of world meeting on future of Internet

Urgent appeal for Iranian blogger held incommunicado

Amnesty International today issued a 'Call to Bloggers', asking them to get online and stand up for freedom of expression on the internet. The organisation says this is a critical time when fundamental rights – particularly freedom of expression and privacy – are under threat from governments that want to control what their citizens say, and what information they can access.

The call comes as the online world prepares to meet at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF, Athens 30/10 – 2/11) to discuss the future of the internet. Amnesty released a statement to the IGF today and is sending a delegation to ensure that human rights are not sidelined and remain at the heart of the forum's discussions.

Amnesty's International's statement also coincides with an urgent appeal on behalf of a blogger in Iran who was detained this month. Kianoosh Sanjari was arrested earlier this month while reporting on clashes between security forces and supporters of Shi'a cleric Ayatollah Boroujerdi. He is being held incommunicado and Amnesty International fears that he may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Sanjari had allegedly gone to the home of Ayatollah Boroujerdi in the capital, Tehran, to prepare a report on the clashes that were taking place there.

Steve Ballinger, part of Amnesty International's delegation to the IGF, said:

"Freedom of expression online is a right, not a privilege – but it's a right that needs defending. We're asking bloggers worldwide to show their solidarity with web users in countries where they can face jail just for criticising the government.

"The Internet Governance Forum needs to know that the online community is bothered about free expression online and willing to stand up for it."

Amnesty International is calling on governments and companies to ensure that human rights – particularly the rights to freedom of expression, association and the right to privacy – are respected and protected.

Steve Ballinger added:

“The internet is a powerful force for human rights, enabling the free flow of ideas and information around the world.

“But some governments have sought to curtail this freedom. People have been locked up just for expressing their views in an email or a website. Sites and blogs have been shut down and firewalls built to prevent access to information. Companies have restricted internet searches to stop people accessing information that repressive governments don’t want them to see.

“Countries and businesses have failed to respect, protect and promote the rights to freedom of expression, association and privacy, and the rights of human rights defenders.”

Yahoo! via its Chinese partner company, Alibaba, has provided the Chinese authorities with private and confidential information about its users that has been used to convict and imprison journalists. It has also agreed to censor and deny access to information. Microsoft shut down the blog of New York Times researcher Zhao Jing on the basis of a Chinese government request. The company has also admitted that it responds to directions from the Chinese government in restricting users of MSN Spaces from using certain terms. Google has launched a censored version of its international search engine in China.

Amnesty International is also highlighting the cases of prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the expression of their peaceful views online.

Chinese journalist Shi Tao used his Yahoo! account to email a US-based website about an internal government directive instructing journalists how to handle media coverage of the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison for "illegally providing state secrets to foreign entities." Yahoo! provided information to the government that was used in his prosecution.

Tunisian lawyer and human rights defender Mohammed Abbou is serving a three and a half year prison sentence largely for publishing articles critical of the Tunisian authorities on the internet.

Vietnamese political dissident Truong Quoc Huy was first arrested in October 2005 with two other young people after chatting on a democracy and human rights website. He was held incommunicado for nine months then released, but on 18 August 2006 he was rearrested in an internet cafe in Ho Chi Minh City, where he had logged on to a chatroom. His whereabouts remain unknown and no charges have been publicised.

Steve Ballinger said:

“We bring with us to the Internet Governance Forum the voices of thousands of people who share our concerns and who have supported Amnesty’s *irrepressible.info* campaign.

“We are calling on governments to release prisoners who are held just for expressing their peaceful views online, and to stop unwarranted censorship of internet sites and searches.”

The organisation welcomed the opportunity presented by the IGF to raise concerns with human rights and the internet.

Steve Ballinger added:

“We are looking forward to participating in the IGF, and being part of a process that will protect human rights on the internet. Amnesty’s job in Athens will be to ensure that human rights are not sidelined – they must be at the heart of all the forum’s discussions.”

Note to Editors

For more media information, including advanced copies of Amnesty International's statement to the IGF, its appeal to bloggers and its Urgent Action appeal for Iranian blogger Kianoosh Sanjari, please contact: Steve Ballinger, Amnesty International press office, +44 (0)20 7033 1548 or +44 (0)7891 565592

For a copy of AI's Urgent Action for Kianoosh Sanjari, please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE131212006>

From 27 October, Amnesty International's statement to the IGF will be available at this link:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engpol300542006>

For more information on Amnesty's campaign for internet freedom see: <http://irrepressible.info>

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

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