

Digital Bridge

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Half a century ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that information was a fundamental human right: 'Everyone has the right to seek, receive and impart information... regardless of frontiers.'

In 1948, this could be no more than a startlingly visionary assertion. Today, thanks to the Net, it expresses an ethical imperative for many of us - perhaps for enough of us to ensure that it becomes a reality within our lifetime.

Having 'cyber-rights' is a powerful new driver enabling a whole slew of other more tangible, social needs to be met - like housing, education, healthcare, clean water.

It is also a means of safeguarding our civil liberties: the freedoms of expression, information and assembly. People from developing or transitional economies are often more acutely conscious of the need for reliable public information and for an uncensored means of expression (remember B-92?) than people who live snugly in countries with relatively open political systems.

The Net can also provide new paths to transparency and accountability. Currently, corrupt practices abound in both the private and public sectors worldwide - so that a stunningly large proportion of funds set aside for social provision leak away in bribes and never reach the poor, for whose benefit they were intended. Poor people are more easily robbed when they are also robbed of access to information - and a means of voicing their own views.

For all these reasons, it seems essential that those who are currently marginalised by their lack of social power should not now be excluded from using the Net.

The OneWorld partnership has been at the forefront of using and debating the issue of online ICTs (information and communication technologies) from its inception in 1994/95 long before the term 'digital divide' was coined. For more on this issue, we have two resources you may find helpful: our Digital Divide campaign, and the [www.oneworld.net/dotforce site](http://www.oneworld.net/dotforce).

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